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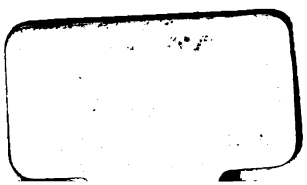

HER FATHER'S NAME.

HER FATHER'S NAME.

A Novel.

BY

FLORENCE MARRYAT,

AUTHOR OF "FIGHTING THE AIR," "LOVE'S CONFLICT," ETC.

In Three Volumes.

VOL. III.

London:

TINSLEY BROTHERS, 8, CATHERINE STREET, W.C.

1876.

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251. d. 72.

CHARLES DICKENS AND EVANS,
CRYSTAL PALACE PRESS.

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HER FATHER'S NAME.

CHAPTER I.

MISS GIBSON.

LEONA LACOSTE did not part readily with a determination once arrived at, but when she came to sit down quietly in the Brighton hotel, and think over the difficulties of successfully impersonating an old woman like Mrs. Gibson, she was fain to cast about her mind for some more suitable idea. For there is no disguise less easy to maintain by daylight than that of a wrinkled old crone by a plump, smooth-skinned young woman. The imitation may pass muster beneath the gaslight, but it would

certainly be detected under the searching glare of day. Not only has the fair, firm flesh to appear shrivelled, discoloured, and empty, but the eyes must lose their brightness, the throat become drawn, the hands bony, pinched, and misshapen. Gray hair, false eyebrows, and paint judiciously applied, may do a great deal towards gaining the desired effect, might even accomplish it for one or two interviews. But Leona foresaw that in the disguise she adopted for Liverpool she would probably have to return to London, and be again subjected to the scrutiny of the Evans, and therefore she abandoned the idea of personating Mrs. Gibson, and determined to appear instead as a niece of that old lady, who had been asked by her aunt to institute inquiries respecting Miss Anson, on her way up to the North. The preparations for this disguise gave her very little trouble. Cosmetics she already possessed, and having procured a gray

front and a few plain articles of attire, such as a female of the middle-class might wear, she put a thick veil over her face, settled her bill at the "Grand," and drove away with her boxes to a smaller hotel. Here she went straight up to her bedroom, whence, in the course of an hour, she emerged—a middle-aged woman. Her chestnut curls all tucked away beneath smooth bands of gray hair completely altered the expression of her face; whilst her dark arched eyebrows, dashed with white, and a few crow's-feet artistically pencilled at the corners of her eyes, drew off the attention from the liquid amber-coloured orbs, that could gleam so wrathfully or lovingly beneath them. She descended to the sitting-room, where her meal was prepared for her, such a staid, matronly-looking body, with her old-fashioned cap tied under her chin, and a small three-cornered shawl pinned discreetly over her bosom, that the maids who had

watched her arrival, nudged each other to look at her now, and whispered, "Did they ever think she was such an old 'un, to judge by her voice."

Not but what Leona had great command also over her voice, and could alter it to suit her own fancy. But she had hardly had time to think about what voice she should assume when this little incident occurred. By the time she reached Liverpool she had accustomed herself to a tone, which no one would have recognised as that in which Don Christobal Valera had ensnared the heart of poor Lucilla Evans.

The acting and managing partner of the firm of Evans and Troubridge, in Liverpool, at that particular moment was a Mr. Lionel, a bachelor of some forty-five or fifty years of age, who was noted for his gallantry to the fair sex.

It was a standing remark that whenever a

woman had occasion to enter the office or the warehouse (which was very seldom), "Old Lionel," as the clerks irreverently termed him, could pay no attention to business, however pressing, until she had passed out of sight again. So incurable was this amiable weakness on the part of the manager of the firm, that his subordinates had been known, on more than one occasion, to play the double trick of sending some pretty woman on a false errand to his office, in order that they might watch his delight at her reception, and ridicule him for all that passed during the interview afterwards. But, naturally, only when his back was turned.

It was, therefore, with a wink of intelligence to his brother clerks, that the sauciest of the lot demurely announced to Mr. Lionel one morning, that "a lady" wished to speak to him.

"A lady! Watson," exclaimed the manager,

pricking up his ears. "Who is she? What is she like?"

"Her name is Miss Gibson, sir; and—she's very nice-looking, sir."

"Oh, show her in, Watson, show her in," said Mr. Lionel; and thus, thanks perhaps entirely to the love of mischief on the part of Mr. Watson, Miss Gibson gained admittance to the presence of the head of the firm.

But though the gray-haired woman who presently appeared to Mr. Lionel was not "all his fancy painted her," she was quite sufficiently "nice-looking" to engage his attention. "Nice-looking," indeed, was just the term to apply to his visitor; for though the hair, and the eyebrows, and the crow's-feet belonged to the supposed Miss Gibson, the clear eyes, the dimpled chin, the beautifully-formed mouth, and all that Leona Lacoste could not paint out of herself remained, to make the woman look as though age had overtaken her through

trouble or sickness, rather than crept upon her unawares.

"Miss Gibson, I believe. Pray be seated, madam," said the manager, courteously.

"I presume that I am speaking to Mr. Evans?" commenced the stranger, as she accepted the offer.

"Oh no! I am Mr. Lionel. Mr. Evans is not in Liverpool at present, but if your business with him is not of a strictly private nature, I have no doubt I shall be able to act for him."

"You are very kind, sir. Perhaps you will allow me to trouble you with a few questions. I have called here at the request of my aunt, Mrs. Gibson, of Willowside. She had charge, many years ago, of a Miss Lucilla Anson, a ward, I believe, of Mr. Evans?"

"Yes, yes!—well?" said Mr. Lionel, becoming grave directly.

"And as I was passing through Liverpool, on my way north, my aunt was anxious that I should see Miss Anson, and send her word how she is, and if she is married, and so on, or get her address that she may communicate with her by letter."

"Miss Anson—who, by the way, is always termed Miss Evans now, by the desire of her adopted father—is not in Liverpool, nor likely to return here. She is alive, and well, and still unmarried. You can tell your aunt so far, but I think I must consult Mr. Evans before giving you his private address. There is always a certain amount of etiquette observable in these matters, you know."

"Mrs. Gibson thought that having had the charge of the young lady for so many years, and being fully acquainted with the history of her birth and her father's death——"

"Indeed!" said Mr. Lionel, bringing his chair closer and lowering his voice, "was Mrs.

Gibson told the secret of Miss Anson's adoption by Mrs. Evans then ?"

"It was pretty well known over the country, sir, though it may be forgotten by this time. And the hand that Mr. Evans' brother had in the business too."

"Hush ! my good lady ; pray speak lower. The unhappy circumstances you allude to are not such public property as you imagine."

"But everybody knows that Mr. George Evans disappeared at the time of the murder, sir, and that there was no suspicion cast on anyone else. I thought that fact was plain enough, though it's no concern of mine."

"True, as you say, it's no concern of ours. But you must not be offended if I ask if your aunt has any idea of using this knowledge of hers in order to——"

While Mr. Lionel was looking about for a word, Miss Gibson supplied it.

"In order to extort money from Mr. Evans

or Miss Anson? No, sir. We have no need of that. We are not well off, but we've not yet come to robbery."

"My dear lady, you must not misinterpret my meaning."

"I do not, sir. But I will tell you candidly, that Mrs. Gibson's desire to know Mr. Evans' address arose from the hope he might be able—and willing—to put me in the way of filling the situation of a housekeeper, or any place of trust. My aunt is now a very old woman, unable to do anything more for her own living, and she did her duty by the child Mrs. Evans placed under her care, and has guarded the secret of how she came to lose her father; and thinks she has—or rather I may have through her—some little claim in consequence on the gentleman's consideration. For we hear he is very rich."

Mr. Lionel felt this was not a case to be dismissed hastily. He knew that women's

tongues are long and loud, and that should he irritate Miss Gibson to proclaim her wrongs, all Liverpool might soon be ringing again with the story that his partner had been trying so many years to put to sleep. He saw that he must be cautious to keep Miss Gibson in good humour—more than that, he must keep her under his own eye until he had communicated with Mr. Evans on the subject.

"You are perfectly right, madam," he said, after some little consideration, "and were my partner here, he would be the first to tell you so. Are you making any stay in Liverpool?"

Now, Leona, with her usual quickness, saw at once by this cautious answer, how the land lay. She had made no plans when she entered the office, having determined to be guided entirely by the force of such circumstances as might meet her there. The event had proved better than all her anticipations. She had the power to make them *fear* her, and her reply

to Mr. Lionel's question was given in accordance with her new discovery.

"That's just as it suits my own pleasure, sir. I can stay or go as I see fit, but I think I shall remain till I've heard something one way or another from Mr. Evans, that is if you'll be so good as to give me his address."

"Well, I've already told you that I think I must ask his permission for that first, and meanwhile I will write anything you wish to say to him. Have you got lodgings yet, Miss Gibson?"

"No, sir; I only arrived in Liverpool this morning, and I don't even know where to look for them."

"I am sure Mr. Evans would not like to think you were put to any inconvenience while waiting for his answer. He will be the first, I feel assured, to acknowledge the strong claim your aunt has upon his gratitude (for he is much attached to his adopted daughter), and

to find fault with me if I have in any way neglected it. I am a miserable bachelor, Miss Gibson," he went on airily, "but I have tolerable accommodation for visitors in my house, and a highly respectable old housekeeper to look after my lady guests; so if you will accept the offer of rooms there during your stay in Liverpool, I can promise you shall be as quiet and undisturbed as though you were under your own roof, and I shall feel it an honour to be of any use to a friend of Mr. Evans."

Leona did not know at first what to say to this proposal—how to decide—whether it would hamper or accelerate her search after the truth. But she saw no way of backing out of it, and she had a strong—almost a superstitious belief in the Fate which was bound to carry her on to the end of her sacred mission. So she accepted the offer of Mr. Lionel's rooms.

"I'm sure I'm much obliged to you, sir,

for taking such care of a stranger, and I think I should be very foolish to say No. And I suppose it cannot be for long that I shall have need to trouble you."

"The longer the better, as far as *I* am concerned," returned Mr. Lionel gallantly; "but I shall communicate with Mr. Evans on the subject to-day, and I do not think you will have to wait for his answer. I shall have the pleasure of seeing you again, I hope, to-morrow, when we will talk further on this matter. Meantime, I am sure I can trust you to mention it to no one."

"Certainly, sir," Miss Gibson replied.

Mr. Lionel drew pen and paper towards him, and hastily wrote a few lines.

"These are for my housekeeper, Mrs. Hodgett, desiring her to see you have everything you may require," he remarked, as he folded the note, "and I will send one of my clerks round to my house with you."

"My luggage is waiting at the door, sir, on a cab."

"Very good. Then there need be no delay."

He opened the door of his sanctum, and called into the outer office.

"*Levitt!* Is Levitt there, Johnson? Send him here to me at once." And thereupon a cry of "*Levitt! Levitt! wanted immediately,*" sounded through the establishment.

Leona started. Here was that name again —the name mentioned in Anson's letter, that was borne by the woman who wept at parting with Anson's child. What mysterious chain of circumstances bound that name of Levitt with the destinies of the Evans family? She had hardly had time to ask herself the question when the present owner of the title appeared.

He was a good-looking lad of fifteen or thereabouts, with dark eyes and hair, and a

bright complexion, who looked as though he could be wicked enough if he chose, but was all meekness and sobriety before Mr. Lionel.

"Here, Levitt, you are to go round with this lady to my house, and give this note to Mrs. Hodgett, and tell her she is to make Miss Gibson as comfortable as possible, and that I have to go over to Manchester this afternoon, and shall not be home till late—ten, or half-past. Do you understand?"

"Yes, sir."

"And after you have seen Miss Gibson safely there, you are to come straight back to the office. Do you hear?"

"Yes, sir," replied the meek Master Levitt, who seemed to carry some remembrance in his face of a former occasion, when he had *not* come "straight back."

"I'm sure I am much obliged to you, sir," said Miss Gibson, with a sweeping curtsey.

"Pray don't mention it," returned Mr. Lionel, as he bowed her out of the office. "Mr. Evans would, I am sure, be greatly annoyed if he found it otherwise. I am only acting as his representative."

Notwithstanding the stranger's gray hair and modest attire, there was an amount of tittering in the office when it was discovered to what point Master Levitt had been desired to navigate her, and, for all her boasted strength of mind, Leona was not sorry when the young gentleman had finished giving directions to the cabman, and, taking his seat by her side, was driven away with her. She looked at his laughing face and wicked eye more than once before she ventured to ask him if he knew Mrs. Hodgett.

"Know old Mother Hodgett! Rather think I did. So will you by to-morrow."

"Why, is she such a formidable old lady then, Master Levitt?"

"You wait till you see her. My eye! I'd sooner 'twas you going to stay with her than me."

"Perhaps she doesn't like young gentlemen so well as I do."

She was careful not to call him a "boy," and check the growth of his budding confidence.

"Do you like 'em? Well, I think you look rather jolly, you know. But as for Hodgett, I never put my foot over her threshold if I can help it."

"If she makes herself as unpleasant to me," said Miss Gibson, "I shall look out for some lodgings."

"Why didn't you get lodgings at first? I would if I'd been you. I wouldn't stay with old Lionel if he'd give me a guinea a day."

"Are there many lodgings to let in Liverpool?"

"Heaps and heaps. My mother lets 'em right down on the docks."

"Does she? I wonder, if I have to stay here long, whether your mother would let me have a room with her?"

"I'm sure she would if I asked her; and we've got the whole house empty now. There's only mother and me and uncle Bill lives there, and he's nobody."

"You shouldn't speak of your uncle in that way, young man, it isn't respectful."

"Oh, but he *is* nobody. He's silly, you know—soft—what do you call it? I knock him about just as if he were a baby."

"Poor fellow! I knew a lady of the name of Levitt years ago. I wonder if it was your mother? Do you mind telling me her name?"

"Mother's name is Mary Anne."

"Oh! This Miss Levitt's name was Rebecca."

"*Aunt Becky!* Oh! I've never seen her, she lives in Paris or London or somewhere. Bill talks of her sometimes, but mother won't let him, because it makes him cry."

"I should very much like to call upon your mother, and talk to her about the lodgings. Do you think she would let me come?"

"Of course she would. Our address is No. 3, Dock Buildings. We often have sailors lodging with us. I wanted mother to let me go to sea, but she wouldn't."

"Are you her only child?"

"That's all, ma'am, and quite enough, as some people say. But here's old Lionel's house. And when are you coming to see mother? Don't come in the day or I shan't be at home."

"I'll come this evening if it's fine. I have nothing to do in this place."

"All right then. I'll tell her, and then if

you like the rooms you can take them, for you'll soon be sick of Mother Hodgett, *I* can tell you. Vinegar's nothing to her. Here, hie! Cabby, stop! First door on the right. That's it. Now, ma'am, here you are."

Master Levitt's graphic description of Mr. Lionel's housekeeper proved but too true. Vinegar *was* nothing to her. She answered the door in person. A prim, stiff, starched old woman, with a sour mouth and a fallen-in jaw, who appeared to regard all of her own sex who had not quite reached her standard of womanhood as natural enemies. Miss Gibson looked fully five-and-forty, but there is a long stretch between that and seventy, and Mrs. Hodgett, having snatched her master's note from Master Levitt's contaminating fingers, and perused it with a pursed-up mouth, turned looks of suspicion even on her middle-aged visitor.

"Well, of all the unreasonable things," she

commenced, "to expect a body to turn out her rooms at a moment's notice, and for a person as she never set eyes on before! And what are *you* staying here for?" she continued, turning round upon the lad, who was gazing at her with his mouth wide open with delight; "you've done what you were told to, I suppose? Be off to your work, you lazy varlet, and don't stand gaping at me as if you'd never seen a respectable woman before."

"Never have! That's why I gape," replied Master Levitt, audaciously. "Haven't done what I was told to either! I've a message for you, old lady, from your master, and you'd better attend to it, or it'll be the worse for you."

"You hold your imperent tongue, and tell me what it is!"

"Why, that you're to make this lady as comfortable as you can, and see that she has everything she wants. Roast turkey, ice

cream, green peas, asparagus, &c. &c. &c. Whether in season or out of season. Do you understand that?"

"He never said anything of the sort," grumbled the old housekeeper.

"Didn't he though? You'd better believe it, or he'll let you know the reason why. And the governor's going over to Manchester this afternoon, and won't be back till three in the morning, and you're to sit up for him and keep his supper hot."

"I sit up! I sit up till three in the morning! An old creature like me, with every bone aching with the rheumatics! I don't believe the master sent any such message. But how's one to know what to believe or disbelieve when he keeps a set of devil's imps like you to carry his orders backwards and forwards? Oh dear! oh dear!"

"Well, you can believe it or not as you choose," shouted the boy as he went down

the street; "but don't say afterwards that I didn't tell you."

And with that Master Levitt disappeared. Mrs. Hodgett shut the hall-door with a groan and ushered her unwelcome guest into a sitting-room.

"You seem a quiet sort of a body," she said, as she scrutinised her appearance. "I suppose I needn't turn the house upside down for you?"

Leona's object was to conciliate the old housekeeper, so she immediately disclaimed the idea of such a thing.

"I should be very sorry if you took any trouble at all on my account, Mrs. Hodgett. I have a little business connected with the firm, and as I am only in Liverpool for a few days Mr. Lionel insisted upon my coming here. The plainest food in the world will do for me. And as I have a great many things to do in the town, I shall be out of doors most of my time."

"Oh! very well! you can please yourself about that, so long as you don't want me to go with you. For I've enough worry downstairs, with only one girl to do the cooking and housework, without running after visitors. If the master meant this to be a lodging-house he should have told me. And then to send up his orders by a worriting young varmint like that Levitt. It's enough to put any woman out. Do you want breakfast to be got for you now? It's past twelve o'clock."

"I should very much like a cup of tea," replied Leona, who had tasted nothing that morning.

"Just what I thought it would be," grumbled Hodgett, as she prepared to crawl downstairs; "worry, and trouble, and cooking, going on from morning till night. It's begun already, and it'll never leave off. Well! I don't call *this* waiting on a single gentleman,

and so I shall tell him, and if he can't live without——"

The rest of her soliloquy was lost in the depths of the kitchen stairs. If Leona's mission had not been such a solemn one, she could have laughed heartily at the old woman's exhibition of temper. But the boy Levitt's information had startled her, and she was rather glad than otherwise to find that Mrs. Hodgett's dislike would remove all bar to her movements whilst she was Mr. Lionel's guest. For her food, she was blissfully indifferent as to what they might place before her. English cooking was distasteful to her palate after the highly-seasoned dishes of the Brazils. And if she could not eat what Mrs. Hodgett supplied, she had but to go out and get her meals elsewhere. What were meals to a woman who felt herself trembling on the brink of a discovery that should clear her father's name from shame!

Leona never anticipated that the search she was prosecuting might end in convincing the world of her father's guilt. Her faith was as strong as her love! She had no knowledge, but she had feeling! She *felt* that he was innocent, and it was this beautiful unswerving filial faith that led her on, without the least doubt of ultimate success, through circumstances of difficulty that would have caused a less brave spirit to turn back and throw up the game long before.

But Leona Lacoste was a woman who would *never* give in—until she died.

CHAPTER II.

"UNCLE BILL."

It was about six o'clock on a fine summer's evening when Leona took her way towards No. 3, Dock Buildings, Liverpool. She had been feverishly anxious to commence her pilgrimage earlier, but two reasons had deterred her. One was the lad's request that she would wait until he was at home. She felt it would be better if he related the circumstances of his meeting with her, and the need that might arise for her requiring apartments, to his mother first. He seemed to have taken a fancy to her, and he was an only child, and probably exerted considerable influence at home. Then, too, she wanted time before

she met these Levitts to think over the sentences in Abraham Anson's letter that alluded to their name, in case anything occurred by which she could gain fresh information concerning it. She had drawn forth the letter from its hiding-place—her bosom—and well pondered over those portions that mentioned the family that seemed in some mysterious way to have been mixed up with her dead father's fortunes.

"I'm sorry to say he's heard about that business with the Levitt's girl, and wanted me to give him particulars. I pretended to know nothing of the affair; but it appears old Levitt has been up to the house, so I'd get away for a short time, Master George, if I was you. I don't want to have to say anything, so I hope the chief won't put me on my oath, but I think the matter might be settled by money. Levitt's very close-fisted, and I shouldn't wonder if that's all he cares about. But if I

try and bleed the chief again, it will bring the Levitt affair right about your ears."

This was all that related to the Levitt family, but Leona saw that the letter had been chiefly written with the view of cautioning her father on this particular subject. Of course she guessed that the "Levitt affair" was a love affair; but how far had it gone? and why should the clerk have been so alarmed lest it should reach the "chief's" ears? "Old Levitt," the father of the girl, to whom allusion was twice made, had probably been employed in the firm, which rendered any trifling with his daughter more likely to annoy the head of it, particularly when the trifler was his own nephew. Leona considered that even an ordinary flirtation, which was destined to end in nothing, might, under the circumstances, be spoken of in as serious a manner. But she could not understand how such a piece of *badinage* could be thought worthy of

compensation by money. It must have been an injury that went deeper than a flirtation. And it was to procure this money to patch up his own folly that her father was supposed to have robbed his uncle's till, and murdered the man who was so anxious to befriend him!

Leona's lip curled even whilst her frame shuddered at the pitiful idea! Her mind was full of these thoughts as she asked her way to Dock Buildings, which were at some distance from Mr. Lionel's house and situated in a less fashionable quarter of the town. When she came to them she found a plain but cheerful row of small dwellings, close to the quay, where all manner of lading and unlading was going on. Dock Buildings were evidently frequented by the seafaring tribe. There was quite a marine appearance about the pink-lipped conch shells, and lumps of rough coral, that adorned the solitary plot of grass or flowers that stood before each doorway; and a

card with the inscription—"Apartments for a single gentleman," was displayed in almost every window. No. 3 was amongst the brightest and most cheerful-looking of the lot. There was an evidence of care about the little place that betokened the industry of the inhabitants. The tiny front garden was filled with blossoming annuals, the steps were as white as snow, and the palings looked as if they had been painted yesterday.

Leona's knock was immediately answered by the lad Levitt himself. He had certainly taken an unusual fancy to his middle-aged acquaintance.

"Here's the lady, mother," he shouted, to some one in the back part of the house. "Do come in, Miss Gibson, and sit down. I say, how have you got on with Mrs. Hodgett? What did she give you for dinner? Old boots and garden snails? She's close enough to do it."

"Not quite so bad as that, Master Levitt," replied Leona, as she followed him into a tiny, neatly-furnished parlour. "Did you tell your mother I was coming to look at the rooms this evening?"

"Of course I did, and here is the old woman to corroborate the statement."

The "old woman," who was a comfortable, matronly person of about forty, now entered, with a broad smile on her face, and shook hands with Miss Gibson, whom she evidently considered on an equality with herself. Leona was glad to perceive this, and immediately proceeded to keep up the illusion, knowing that the more familiar she could become with her new acquaintances, the more she was likely to get out of them.

"I hope you expected me," she said, as they exchanged greetings. "Your son here was good enough to invite me to come over and have a look at your apartments this

evening, as I may be in want of some myself before long."

"Oh yes. Harry told me all about it, ma'am," replied Mrs. Levitt, "and as soon as ever I heard that Mr. Lionel had sent you to stay with Mrs. Hodgett I said, 'Well, if she doesn't change her quarters as soon as ever she can, she'll be the first person that ever liked 'em.' So sit down, Miss Gibson, and make yourself comfortable. And now you'll have a cup of tea with us, for I'm sure Mrs. Hodgett hasn't given you anything fit to drink since you've been in Liverpool, has she?"

"Well, it wasn't very strong, certainly," said Leona, laughing; and Mrs. Levitt remarked, as she bustled about to set the tea-service, that she expected it tasted more of the water than anything else.

They sat down to tea together; she, the mother, and the office lad, but Leona looked for the advent of "Uncle Bill" in vain.

"Well, your face is free enough from wrinkles," said Mrs. Levitt, after she had been examining her visitor closely. "I shouldn't say you had seen much of trouble in your day, ma'am."

"Indeed, you are mistaken, Mrs. Levitt, I may not show it, but I've had many a care. It's care alone that's brought me up to Liverpool."

"Indeed now, I never should have thought it! I hope you haven't got any money in the business. Not but what the house is as safe as safe can be, but I hate speculations of all sorts. It was that brought my poor husband down to an untimely grave."

"You are a widow, then?"

"Bless you, yes! and been so ever since this lad here was four years old. Mr. Levitt was employed under Evans and Troubridge. That's why they took on Harry as soon as he was big enough."

"And I'm sure I wish they never had," interposed Harry, with his mouth full.

"Hold your tongue, you foolish boy," replied his mother. "It was the most natural thing for them to do. The Levitts have worked under them—and worked well, too—for four generations past."

"So I have always understood," said Miss Gibson. "I knew the family twenty years ago. My aunt brought up Miss Lucilla Anson, the daughter of the head-clerk—who was—— you remember!"

"The daughter of *who*, ma'am?"

"Of Mr. Anson, who was murdered, you know. You recollect the murder that took place here about that time, surely?"

Here the mother glanced at her son, who rose from the table, and closed the parlour door carefully.

"I didn't know as Anson had a daughter," remarked Mrs. Levitt.

"It was before your time perhaps."

"It happened before my marriage with Mr. Levitt, though, of course, I've often heard him speak of it. It was a sad thing altogether."

"Very sad, and particularly as Mr. George Evans had a hand in it."

"How, ma'am, did you know Mr. George?"

"Yes, well."

"And you believe he murdered poor Anson? Don't they believe so in Liverpool?"

"Such as remember it I suppose do, but he never came back to tell the truth for himself, and the story's mostly forgotten now. Though they *do* say that's the only reason Mr. Henry Evans—Mr. George's younger brother, you know, ma'am—has left Liverpool to live in London. The whole family is up there now."

"And is Miss Anson living with them? My aunt is very anxious to find out her present address."

"You quite surprise me, ma'am, with your mention of Miss Anson, for I never heard tell of her before. Mr. Evans has one daughter, I believe, but as for the other, it's quite news to me."

"Well, I can assure you it's true, Mrs. Levitt, and I daresay there are several other things that I could tell you about the Evans that would surprise you to hear. Those great people have so many means of keeping their secrets close."

"Ah, you may well say that, ma'am! but my James, he never was a man for telling about others. Often and often he aggravated me to that degree with his secrecy I could hardly abide him; and his father, old Mr. Levitt, was for all the world as bad. Not a word could you ever get out of either of them."

"Is old Mr. Levitt still alive?"

"Dear me, no! He died twenty years

ago. He never was himself after the murder. He quite shut himself up from society and wasted away. But then he had his own reasons for fretting, poor old gentleman."

"Ah! you mean about his daughter?" said Leona, making a shot at the truth.

"Lor! ma'am, you seem to know everything about everybody."

"But I know Rebecca Levitt personally. She came down to my aunt's house with Miss Anson."

"With Miss Anson! Well, I never! Now, did she?" exclaimed Mrs. Levitt, in three volleys of surprise.

"So, of course, I heard all about that little affair with Mr. George."

"Did you know they was married then?" exclaimed Mrs. Levitt. At this question Leona's presence of mind forsook her. She felt her colour fade, her face change, her limbs tremble.

"Married! No. Good heavens! they were never *married*," she cried.

"Well, as I used to tell my James, it seemed unlikely, for the girl had no lines to show. But you see, before Mr. George disappeared, there had been a great noise about him and Rebecca, and old Mr. Levitt was quite mad about it, and determined to make him do her justice; but, when the murder took place and he was gone, of course there was an end to it, and he wouldn't have seen them man and wife if he could. But it was then—so I hear, ma'am, for I wasn't in Liverpool at the time—that Rebecca stood out for it that she had been married to Mr. George, and that he had the lines with him. And I believe she sticks up for the truth of it to this day."

"But where is Rebecca now?" stammered Leona. She hated herself for her want of self-control, but if this were true—*what was she!*

"Ah! that's more than I can tell you. She left Liverpool before I came to it. My husband did hear once as she was married to a jeweller of the name of ——. Now, what was that jeweller's name, Harry? I know it was not English, but I can't for the life of me lay my tongue to it."

"Perhaps your uncle might be able to remember it. Didn't you tell me you had an uncle living with you?" said Leona, appealing to the boy.

"Uncle Bill! Not he. He cannot remember his own name, can he, mother?"

"Oh no. He's been quite a poor natural ever since he came back from America," replied Mrs. Levitt.

"America! Has he been to America?" demanded Leona, hastily.

"Yes, ma'am. He ran away to sea, poor foolish fellow, the very night that Mr. George Evans took himself off. There was quite a

commotion about the two disappearing together. Some thought as Mr. George had arranged it on purpose so as to throw the suspicion on poor Bill, but everyone knew as he was more than half a fool, poor fellow, and his father was here to stick up for him, so it passed over. But years after, when old Mr. Levitt was dead and gone, this poor silly was brought back to my husband with scarcely a rag to his back, by a stranger who had taken pity on his condition, and we've never been able rightly to make out what happened to him meanwhile. He's lived with us ever since, for I couldn't turn him out when James died, and I suppose he'll bide on now till the end. There's only one subject that excites him, and that's the mention of his sister Becky, and so I never let him hear her name. And that's why I wouldn't bring him into the parlour this evening, because Harry told me you wanted news of her."

"I hope you will let me see him before I go, though," said Leona, "for I take a deep interest in all the family."

"*Antoine* was the name of Aunt Becky's jeweller, mother," interrupted the boy, as the remembrance flashed on him.

"To be sure it was. And I suppose she's Mrs. *Antoine*. A curious name to go by in a Christian country."

"But if she was married to Mr. George Evans, how can she be married to *M. Antoine?*" said Leona.

"Well, ma'am, the less said about that, I suppose, the better. She couldn't be married to both of them, could she now? For Mr. George may be alive and well at this moment, for aught we know. But all families, great and small, have their secrets, and I daresay poor Becky, married or not married, ain't worse than half the ladies in the land."

"I should very much like to see Rebecca

again," mused Leona. "I suppose you never heard what part of London she settled in?"

"No, ma'am, no; and I don't even remember if it was London or Paris. My James never seemed to covet any communication with her after the business of the murder; indeed he didn't like the mention of her name. But 'tis a long time ago now, and my motto is, 'Let bygones be bygones.'"

"With regard to the murder of Mr. Anson —was no suspicion ever cast on any one else?"

"I believe not, ma'am. I never heard of it. I think everyone was quite convinced it was Mr. George, and his running away looked like it, didn't it now? If he had only stayed to answer questions. But he was clean gone the very next morning—as clean gone as that poor fool Bill, who did turn up again as you may see. And the till being robbed, too. It was a shameful business. I don't think anybody ever had a doubt in the matter,

even to poor Rebecca, for she never held up her head after it came to light, and the only time my husband saw her afterwards, he said he shouldn't have known her in the street, she was so changed."

"I wonder what made Mr. Henry Evans adopt Anson's child. It was hardly necessary," said Leona, thoughtfully.

"Ah, there you puzzle me, ma'am, for, as I've told you, your mention of it is the first I ever heard of Anson having a child. I know he was a widower, but from first to last I never heard speak of a family. And Becky took her down to your aunt's, too?"

"That she certainly did, and cried very much when she parted with her."

"Well, that beats everything; but it's a mystery to me. Will you come and look at the bedroom now, ma'am, if you've finished your tea. It's always ready to be seen, I'm proud to say."

Leona rose, and followed Mrs. Levitt up the narrow staircase to a nice clean little bedroom, looking over the busy quay.

"You wouldn't mind the noise and the bustle here, after a bit," remarked her would-be landlady, "and the masts of the shipping seem quite like company to me. Have you ever been on the sea, ma'am?"

"Yes."

"Ah! Well I haven't, and I don't wish to, either; but I like to live near the traffic. We have all the big steamers from America unloading here. There was one came in only this morning. Such a lot of passengers as they bring. The hotels won't hold them sometimes."

Leona admired the room, and appreciated its proximity to the quay to Mrs. Levitt's entire satisfaction, but was unable to say when she would take possession of it, or whether she would require it at all.

"For I am waiting for an answer to a letter that Mr. Lionel has sent to Mr. Evans on my account, and when it arrives I may have to go on at once to London."

"It's all the same to me, ma'am. My rooms are never empty long, and I'm very glad to have had the opportunity of making your acquaintance, particularly as you've been so nearly connected with the family. Here's poor Bill, if you'd like to have a peep at him," added Mrs. Levitt, as she opened the door of a side room.

It looked out upon a strip of garden at the back, and the sprays of a climbing clematis were intruding through the open window. Seated with his back towards them, and unoccupied, save by twisting the scented blossoms in his fingers, sat a man of not more, perhaps, than fifty years of age, although his hair and beard were gray. He was such a fine, broad-chested fellow, and looked

so strong and hearty, that Leona could hardly believe she saw the poor natural she had been told of, until her companion went up to him and laid her hand upon his shoulder.

"Now, Bill," she said, as though she were speaking to a little child, "where are your manners? Here's a lady come to see you. Can't you make her a nice bow and say 'Good evening'?"

But Uncle Bill, taking no notice of the appeal, kept his eyes steadily fixed upon the spray of clematis he was destroying.

"There now, see what mischief you are up to, breaking off the flowers in that lavish way. Leave them alone, do," said Mrs. Levitt, slapping his hands, "and stand up like a man and make your duty to the lady."

At this renewed adjuration, Uncle Bill consented to turn his head and look at the

stranger, but the minute his eyes fell upon her face, he gave a sharp cry, and trembling hid his face in his hands.

"Lor! now! what's took the fellow?" exclaimed his sister-in-law, as she attempted to shake him into reason. "He's just like this, ma'am, night and day. You never know where to have him, nor what he'll do next. Here, Bill, hold up, I say, or I'll send you straight off to bed this very minute! there!"

"I didn't do it," said the man, in a strangely-terrified tone of voice. "They said I did it; but someone held my hand, and it was all in the dark—in the dark—in the dark! *Why was it in the dark?*" he interrupted himself suddenly to demand of Mrs. Levitt.

"Bless you! how should I know? Because it wasn't in the light, I suppose. There, hold your tongue, do, and don't talk any more rubbish."

"*He* didn't do it," said Bill, pointing at Leona with his finger.

"He takes you for a man now," cried Mrs. Levitt. "Was there ever such a natural?"

"If you slept, you couldn't feel," continued Bill, as he turned his mournful eyes upon Leona.

"No, Bill, I couldn't," she replied, anxious to draw him into conversation.

"But three days is too long to sleep; and yet you did not die. And you believed it, you believed it!"

"Yes, I believed it," said Leona.

"Why have you come back here? Do you mean to tell of father?"

"Why, if he isn't off on his father now, and I don't know that I ever heard him mention him before! He's as good as a play, poor Bill is; you never know what tricks he won't be up to next."

"Mother, you're wanted!" shouted Harry from below-stairs.

"Who is it, my dear?"

"It's Captain Gray; and he can't wait."

"Lor! Miss Gibson, do you mind my running down for a minute? You can stay in the next room if you prefer it to this."

"I would rather stay here," replied Leona. She was longing to be left alone with Bill.

"*Where is your father?*" she asked him, as soon as Mrs. Levitt had disappeared.

The fool looked round mysteriously before he answered.

"I mustn't tell, or he will beat me. I mustn't tell anything—how it happened, or why I went away. Hush! they are coming."

"But you went away with Mr. George, didn't you?"

"Why, *you* are Mr. George," replied the idiot, with a look of cunning delight at his supposed discovery. "Why do you try to

hide yourself under this?" pulling at her skirts.

Leona started. The poor fool had seen a likeness to her father, even under her disguise. But he mustn't be allowed to bruit about his knowledge. She must turn the current of his ideas.

"Nonsense!" she said sharply. "I am a woman. I used to know your sister Rebecca."

At that name Bill burst out crying. "Oh, poor Becky!" he moaned, rocking himself backwards and forwards; "poor, poor Becky! Hush-a-by, baby; hush-a-by. He'll never own it, Becky. It's no use. He daren't do it. *Father shall make him do it?* Ah, yes! if father can—if father can! Poor Becky, poor Becky!"

And then, suddenly changing his tone to one of entreaty, he continued:

"It wasn't me, Becky. Don't look at me

with them eyes, or you'll kill me. What if it had been *him?* What then? What then? Oh, poor Becky! Poor, poor Becky!"

"Now, if he hasn't set off on Becky!" exclaimed Mrs. Levitt, in a tone of vexation, as she bustled into the room again. "You'd better come downstairs, ma'am, for he'll never leave off till we've shut him up for the night." And thereupon she insisted upon conducting Leona back to the little parlour where they had had their tea.

But during the remainder of the time that she stayed there she could still distinguish the tones of the poor fool upstairs moaning over the same burden—

"*What if it had been him? What then? What then? Oh, poor Becky! Poor, poor Becky!*"

CHAPTER III.

A VOICE FROM THE PAST.

It is marvellous to what extent human nature can control itself when under the fear of discovery, or the necessity for caution. To all outward appearance Leona was interested in the garrulous gossip of Mrs. Levitt until the last farewell had been exchanged between them; but as she left the little house, and refusing all Master Harry's offers of escort, commenced to wend her way back to Mr. Lionel's, she fairly staggered beneath the remembrance of the dreadful doubt that had been communicated to her.

Her father married to Rebecca Levitt! It was impossible. He could not have so dis-

graced himself. He could not have done *her* so irreparable a wrong! Yet, even whilst she pondered, there flew into Leona's mind so many instances in which men had, just as weakly and inconsiderately, done their children an irreparable wrong, that she shuddered and ceased railing. Suppose her dead father *had* committed the youthful folly of which he was suspected! What was the upshot? Rightfully or wrongfully, he found himself banished to a foreign country, separated from all his friends, alone, without love, or sympathy, or comfort! What more natural, if under such circumstances, he had found himself unable to resist the temptation to accept the affection of a young and attractive woman, and make her the sharer of his sorrows and joys? Her father had seldom mentioned the name of her mother to her. The packet of letters she possessed told her nothing. They might have been written from a wife to her

husband, or a mistress to her lover. They breathed but expressions of the most tender and confiding affection. Her father's love for herself had been very devoted. Had he made it so, to try, in some measure, to repair the awful wrong he had done her? As poor Leona thought on these things, and tried to throw her mind back into the past, and disinter some word, or look, or action, that should throw light upon the mystery that puzzled it, she felt her brain reel with the momentousness of the question. *She*—who had so prided herself upon her European blood and ancestry; she—who had believed her father to be one of the most honourable and upright gentlemen the world had ever produced; she—to be compelled to know herself to be nothing, worse than nothing—a nameless, parentless, base-born outcast!—the child of a murderer! For here Leona began, for the first time, to falter in her perfect faith in her

father's innocence! If he were capable of the one crime, he might have been capable of the other! And the idea of a disreputable marriage, to be denied or concealed, seemed to imply a more tangible reason for the terrible events that followed it, than the mere fears of discovery of a few youthful follies or extravagances. Blinded by the tears that overflowed her eyes as Fancy conjured up one fearful image after another to her mind, and too much absorbed in her own miserable imaginings to take much heed of the way she was going, Leona roused herself after a while to the knowledge that she had lost her road. Liverpool is a large and bewildering place to a stranger, and though she had certainly started in the direction of Mr. Lionel's house, she had as certainly permitted her feet to miss some turning or other that should have conducted her towards it. She was first made aware of the fact by a porter run-

ning up against her with a large bale upon his shoulder, and as she stepped out of his way she fell against a truck that was being wheeled in the opposite direction. It was now nine o'clock at night, and as dark as it ever becomes at that time of the year. Leona started from her absorbing reverie to find that she had left the narrow way of the streets and gained the docks. Before her rose the tall masts of the shipping, dimly defined against the darkening sky, whilst all around lay bales of cotton, and silk, and fibre, and casks of sugar, and rice, and molasses, and piles of iron, and wood, and all the other species of merchandise that make England the golden land that it is—waiting their removal on board ship, or their consignment to their relative owners on shore. The hour was too late for much traffic to be going on. The numerous public-houses that surrounded the wharves had claimed most of the workers of the day,

as the shouting, and swearing, and singing that proceeded from them proclaimed. But here and there some one might be seen working after hours. Some few porters were still conveying goods or luggage to their destination, and one or two groups of better-dressed people, passengers apparently by some of the numerous steamers lying in dock, were standing about the quay, either inquiring for their luggage or giving directions concerning it.

As Leona came upon this scene, she felt quite dazed and giddy. Her heart and her head were beating tumultuously, and at first she hardly realised where she was. But when she did so, she stopped for a moment to recover herself. The moon had risen above the tall black masts in the river, and was shining down upon her with a calm and tranquilising light. The night air blew refreshingly across the water, and seemed to clear her feverish and giddy brain. She felt grateful for the support

which nature's elements afforded her, and drawing into the shadow, sat down upon an unused truck to rest herself. Whilst she was in this position some gentlemen passed her, followed by a porter. They were talking together, and in a moment she recognised the accents of her beloved Spanish tongue, and became all interest and attention.

"You will scarcely get your luggage at this time of night," said the first speaker. "You had better make up your mind at once to do without it till to-morrow morning."

"But I cannot do without it," replied the second. "It is a small portmanteau, but it contains the actual necessaries of the toilet. They promised to forward it to-day. It is most provoking."

"Which steamer, sir?" demanded the porter.

But Leona did not wait to hear which steamer. At the sound of that second voice

she had nearly started to her feet, and only by a strong effort of will controlled herself from calling out his name aloud.

For it was the voice of Christobal Valera.

They had passed so quickly that she had not had an opportunity of distinguishing his features, but she could not be mistaken in his voice.

It was Christobal. Her brother, her friend —her one beloved companion—in England, close to her, almost within her arms. As the truth struck her, she had nearly run after and claimed him. But then she remembered her disguise, and her reasons for assuming it, and all the consequences that must ensue from discovering her identity, and shrunk back again, feeling the necessity for concealment press harder on her than it had ever done before. But still she might see him, he would not recognise her. She might look on his face and judge of his well-doing by his looks—her poor

Tobal! whom she had left so ill and languid—from whom she had existed so long without a line to say if he had lived or died!

As Leona decided thus, she started after the gentlemen, and came up with them just as they had reached the edge of the quay, and were looking somewhat despondently after their messenger, making his way towards the plank bridge that connected the wharf with the New York steamer, which displayed but a single light to show that anyone was awake on board of her.

"I very much fear they will refuse to let you take away any of your possessions so late as this," repeated the speaker who had spoken first before.

"What a croaker you are, Guzman," replied Valera. "The baggage was to be all had up from the hold this morning. I *must* have it. There's no question about the matter. I leave for London the first thing to-morrow."

She crept nearer to them as they spoke, and tried to look as though she too were waiting for news from the steamer. She could see him plainly now. His large, dark eyes, his delicate features, and silky moustache. She could even distinguish on the little finger of his left hand the gold ring she had given him when they were children, and which she had often laughed at him since for continuing to wear.

The moonlight glanced on the trinket, and made it glitter; and something in Leona's eyes made the glittering circle dance. She was too much occupied with the one thought that Christobal was standing before her even to feel surprised at recognising in his companion, the identical Don Guzman with whom she had fought the duel on her journey from Rio to New York. All her thoughts were absorbed in the knowledge that the greatest friend she possessed was close to her.

Presently, as Christobal gazed over the water, she heard him sigh.

"*Presto!* What ails you now?" exclaimed Don Guzman. "Dreaming of the blue eyes of the fair Lilias, eh, Valera?"

At these words Leona's hearing quickened.

"Perhaps," said Valera, vaguely, as he sighed again.

"What, another!" cried Guzman. "I didn't think you were quite so far gone as that. But, in truth, Don, you have not been in good spirits lately."

"I do not know that my spirits were boisterously happy at any time, Guzman. I have many troubles of which I say nothing, and the fact of finding myself in a strange country, away from all my old associations, brings them more vividly to my mind."

"New scenes will help to disperse them, Valera."

"I trust so. But I came to England with

a secret hope which seems to have faded with the first view of her shores."

"Well, the view from these docks is not soul-inspiring. A good night's rest will make you see things in a better light. Here comes the porter with your valise. He has got it, after all. I congratulate you. And now let us retrace our steps to the hotel. You go to London the first thing to-morrow morning, do you not?"

"The first thing to-morrow morning," repeated Christobal, indifferently, as they turned away.

Leona watched their retreating figures until they were lost in the surrounding darkness; then, groping her way towards a pile of goods, she sat down upon the nearest bale, and burst into a flood of tears.

It was late before she reached Mr. Lionel's house, and Mrs. Hodgett professed to be quite scandalised. "*She* had never heard of such a

thing before, not she; as ladies tramping out on the street half the night, which she'd always been told it wasn't considered respectable for folk to do; and she hoped that Mr. Lionel might take notice of it, that she did."

Leona pushed past the grumbling old creature, with scarcely a "Good night," and found her way up to her own bedroom. She was in no condition either to argue the point or to excuse herself. All she wished was to be left alone, to think over what was to be done next. A few hours back, had her plans been demanded of her, she would have expressed her determination to remain in Liverpool until she had found out all that was to be discovered with respect to her father's secret connection with the Levitts. But now—since she had encountered Christobal upon the wharf, and heard his destination, she was all eagerness to follow him to London. She felt as though she must breathe the same air as he did. The

sight of him had acted on her like the taste of blood upon the tiger. She thirsted to see him again.

So she began to hope that Mr. Lionel's appeal on her behalf to Mr. Evans might be responded to by some desire to speak to her in person, and to think that if it were not so she must go to town on her own speculation. But she was not disappointed. At an early hour the next morning the surly old housekeeper informed her that her master wished to see her before he went to the office, and on her entering the dining-room she found him ready charged with directions concerning her.

"Good morning, Miss Gibson. Pray be seated. I trust Mrs. Hodgett has made you as comfortable as the poor resources of a bachelor's establishment will permit. Mr. Evans has lost no time in replying to my communication respecting you, Miss Gibson. I received his answer this morning."

"Oh, ho!" thought Leona to herself, "so you considered my claim of sufficient importance, then, to demand a telegram, for by no other means could Mr. Evans have heard of it in time to write by the afternoon post."

But all she said aloud and demurely was, "Indeed, sir!"

"Yes. I told you he would be the last person to deny such a plea as you bring forward in support of your claim to his patronage. My partner is a kind-hearted man, as well as a good and generous one. He perfectly remembers and acknowledges the care which your good aunt bestowed upon Miss Lucy Evans (you will please to note in speaking of that young lady, Miss Gibson, that Mr. Evans much objects to hear her mentioned by any name but his own), and would wish to requite it, if possible, by being of use to you. You told me, I believe, that

your object was to obtain some place as housekeeper or nurse?"

"Any place of trust, sir. I have not been used to menial offices."

"Of course, of course; naturally. Mr. Evans hopes he may be able to help you to some such situation, but he would wish to see and speak to you first. He desires me in this letter," continued Mr. Lionel, carelessly twisting about the sheet of notepaper he held in his hand, "to ask if you will go to London and see him on the subject."

"It is a long way to go for an uncertainty," remarked Leona, thinking it wiser to make a few preliminary objections.

"It is a long way," acquiesced Mr. Lionel. "My partner is quite aware of that fact, and that you may not be prepared to run about the country on a mere speculation. But—— will you excuse me for a moment, Miss Gibson?" he continued, interrupting him-

self suddenly, and preparing to leave the room.

"Certainly," replied Leona, remarking with secret satisfaction that he had already in an abstracted manner laid his partner's letter on the mantel-shelf.

As the door closed behind him, she sprung from her seat and seized the paper. It contained but a few words:

"DEAR LIONEL,—You have acted perfectly right. Send the woman on to London at any cost. Pay all her expenses, bribe her if necessary, or bring her yourself; but make her come straight from your house to our office. I think I have a plan for keeping her under my own eye.—Yours in haste,

"HENRY EVANS."

She had scarcely replaced the letter in its former position when Mr. Lionel re-

entered the room with some bank-notes in his hand.

"My partner being unwilling you should be hampered by any unforeseen expense in travelling, Miss Gibson, has begged me to give you these from him, and to request you will use them to defray the cost of your journey to London."

As he spoke he tried to place two five-pound notes in her hand. But she drew backward.

"I am much obliged to Mr. Evans for his offer, sir, but I am in no immediate want of money."

"But come, Miss Gibson, you will not refuse to take them, I am sure. Money is always acceptable, whether we have our pockets full or not."

"I must refuse, Mr. Lionel. I told you yesterday I had no design to beg from Mr. Evans."

"Well! I suppose you must have your own way, but my partner will be annoyed to hear of it. When do you intend to go to London? There is no hurry, you know. My poor rooms are at your service for as long as you choose to use them."

"You are very good, sir, but I think the sooner I see Mr. Evans the better. Should my application to him prove unsuccessful, I must go on to my friends in Scotland. You have not yet given me the address in London where I am to call."

"Ah! to be sure; well, here it is—Messrs. Evans and Troubridge, 320, High Holborn. You will not forget it."

"I will write it down," she answered, "and I shall start to-day."

"So soon?" said Mr. Lionel.

"Yes, sir. I have no time to spare."

"Why, I have just seen a young gentleman who has come over from America on

business with the firm off by the train. You might have travelled together, if I had known it, and Don Valera could have taken care of you on the journey."

"What name did you say, sir?"

"Don Christobal Valera. By the way, a most curious thing happened the other day to our London firm. But I will not detain you, Miss Gibson. The story might possibly possess no interest for you, and, if it does, you will hear all about it when you get up to town, for they can talk of nothing else in the house at present. If you are quite determined to leave us to-day, there is an excellent train at eleven and another at twelve. You will not, in any case, be in time to see Mr. Evans, but he will, doubtless, give you an interview the first thing to-morrow morning."

"I thank you, sir, I shall present myself at the office in Holborn as soon after ten o'clock to-morrow morning as possible. I am

extremely obliged to you for all the civility and kindness you have shown me, Mr. Lionel. It may prove the turning-point in my career."

"I trust it may lead to a comfortable berth, somewhere," replied Mr. Lionel, as he bowed her to the door. "A snug housekeeper's place to some rich old bachelor; eh, Miss Gibson? How would that suit now? or head-nurse in a duchess's family?"

"I would rather have the first, sir," replied the supposed Miss Gibson, gaily; and Mr. Lionel chuckled, and said she was a sly puss, and he wouldn't trust her to remain Miss Gibson long if she once got some unfortunate bachelor under the domination of her eyes.

Two hours after she was travelling back to London, and Mr. Evans had received a telegram to that effect.

* * * * *

The following morning he sat in his office, expecting her promised visit with anything but

pleasurable anticipations. For so many years past the subject of his unfortunate brother's crime and self-banishment had been so completely tabooed that he had almost come to believe that the world had forgotten it, and he would never hear it mentioned again. And to have it crop up through a stranger, and one who visited Liverpool, and for aught he knew might be induced to take up her residence there, was very annoying. His whole aim had been to hush the matter up, so that the interests of the firm might not be damaged by the memory of so ugly a story; and now to be told that this woman, who had been intimately acquainted with members of his family at the very time of the occurrence, had appeared with the whole story fresh in her memory, and ready to be retailed on the slightest occasion, provoked him beyond measure. From the moment of receiving Mr. Lionel's telegram he had resolved on one thing. Miss Gibson must

either be bought *up*, or bought *out*. She must either be bound down by gratitude to hold her tongue, or she might be bribed to adopt an exile, where it might wag without detriment to his family or himself. But before he decided on which course of action to pursue, he must see what sort of woman he had to deal with. He had never met the aunt, but he had heard excellent accounts of her. If the niece were like her, she might be a person of delicacy, with feelings to be appealed to, and a sense of honour which would make her shrink with horror from the idea of betraying the trust of the family who befriended her. With such ideas coursing through his brain, Mr. Evans waited the advent of Miss Jane Gibson with feverish anxiety. As she entered his private office he almost trembled. But there was nothing in her appearance to alarm him. On the contrary, when he looked up and encountered the smooth, placid face, and

bands of gray hair, surrounded by the plain net cap and quaker-like bonnet, that this middle-aged person presented to him, he felt reassured. Leona had taken the extra precaution during this interview of shielding her glorious eyes with a pair of spectacles, and though Mr. Evans slightly started as she first met his view, her further appearance aroused no remembrance in him of the gay *débonnair* boy who had so mysteriously disappeared from his family circle.

"Miss Gibson, I believe," he commenced, nervously. "Pray be seated, madam. My partner, Mr. Lionel, informs me that you consider, in consequence of certain services rendered in past times to my daughter, that——"

Now, Leona had fully weighed the worth of the stress Mr. Evans, in his letter to Mr. Lionel, had laid on the necessity of her being sent up to London "at any cost," and determined

to find out of how much consequence her knowledge was to him. So she interrupted him here without ceremony.

"I beg your pardon, sir. You are alluding, I suppose, to *Mr. Anson's* daughter?"

Mr. Evans frowned.

"Whatever name that young lady may be entitled to by rights, she has been known now for many years to the world *only* as my adopted daughter, Miss Gibson——"

"Very good, sir. So I have heard; but I thought that between you and me——"

"*Between you and me*, Miss Gibson? What do you wish me to understand by using that expression—*between you and me?*"

"That there is not the same necessity for caution, Mr. Evans, as there would be were you speaking to a stranger. *I know all!*"

"All—all? What do you mean by all?" he repeated, with a sickly smile, although the

hand with which he played with his ivory paper-cutter shook as he awaited her reply.

Leona drew her chair closer to his.

"All about the murder of Abraham Anson, sir," she said, in a low voice, "and the part that was taken in it—and *by whom—and the reason why you wish Miss Lucilla Anson to be known by the name of Evans.*"

CHAPTER IV.

"DIAMOND CUT DIAMOND."

As Leona uttered these words, Mr. Evans rose hurriedly from his chair, and turning the handle of the door, glanced into the passage beyond, to satisfy himself there were no listeners to their conversation. And as he reseated himself she saw that even in that short time his face had grown whiter and more troubled, and felt she was on the right track.

"You speak very strangely, Miss Gibson," he said, as he passed his handkerchief across his brow, "and too openly to be agreeable. If, as you affirm, you know, or have heard, all the details of that unfortunate business, your

good sense and natural delicacy of feeling must surely point out to you the propriety of not making the subject a common one."

"Certainly, sir; and hitherto my lips have been closed to all. But considering the time *at* which, and the circumstances under which Miss Lucilla Anson——"

"I must beg of you, madam, to call that young lady by her accustomed name," interrupted Mr. Evans, almost fiercely.

"I beg your pardon—Miss Lucilla *Evans*. Considering the time and the circumstances, as I was saying before, sir, it is scarcely likely that I should not be acquainted with the whole story of her birth, particularly as I know Rebecca Levitt."

At that name Mr. Evans started up as if he had been shot.

"*Rebecca Levitt!*" he exclaimed. "Why, she's dead years and years ago!"

"Not at all, sir," replied Leona, coolly.

"On the contrary, she is living and married, or supposed to be so."

"Whom did she marry? Where does she live?"

"I am not quite sure if I should be justified in telling you that, without her consent, sir. Rebecca has kept out of your way for a long time, and doubtless had her own reasons for doing so."

"Miss Gibson, tell me the truth," said Mr. Evans, solemnly, as he wheeled round and confronted her. "Is this a plot on the part of Rebecca Levitt and yourself to obtain possession of any property of hers that she may imagine to be in my hands?"

This most unexpected question opened up such a new field of conjecture that Leona was for a moment bewildered, and hardly knew what to answer. But one thing was certain. This idea of Rebecca Levitt being close at hand, and producible at any moment, was an

alarming one to Mr. Evans. And she must not let him know that his fear was unfounded.

"*A plot*, sir," she replied. "I am surprised that you should think fit to use such a term to me. How or for what reasons should I be concerned in a plot against you? My aunt, Mrs. Gibson, had the charge of Miss Lucilla for several years, and did her duty by her. She is now too old and feeble to work any more; in fact she has become childish, and is under the charge of an attendant. Under these circumstances I find myself obliged to earn my own living and support her. What is more natural than that I should apply to you for assistance—to you, who are the most wealthy of all her former employers? But that you should consider me capable of——"

And at this juncture Miss Gibson's feelings getting the better of her fortitude, her voice

broke down, and her handkerchief went up to her eyes.

"Indeed, my dear madam, you are quite mistaken. I had no intention of wounding you in this manner, but I must confess that the name and remembrance of Rebecca Levitt are alike distasteful to me. I am quite ready to acknowledge how much I am indebted to your good aunt for the care she took of my adopted daughter during her childhood, and to return her kindness in any way in which I am capable, to yourself. Will you tell me openly what are your circumstances, and how I can afford you assistance?"

"My circumstances, sir, are such that I am on the look-out for any situation in which I can earn my own living."

"I suppose you want some very superior situation, though, such as superintendent of a gentleman's family, or companion to a lady? You would not undertake any lower office, eh?"

"I would undertake anything, sir, by which I can get my livelihood," said Leona, thinking only of the best answer by which to keep up the character she had assumed.

"If that is the case, I may be able to help you. Were you attached to the person of Miss Lucilla Evans when a child?"

"I was always fond of children," she replied, evasively.

"Should you know her again, do you think, were you to see her?"

"Yes, sir, I am sure of that."

"Then would you like to undertake the charge of her, that is of her apartments, wardrobe, &c.? My daughter is an invalid, Miss Gibson; and lately, I am sorry to say, she has been more delicate than usual. Our old nurse and housekeeper, Mrs. Raymond, has been her attendent hitherto, but she has been laid up with gout for some days past, and will

never, perhaps, be able to resume her duties about Miss Lucy. At any rate the companionship of a superior person like yourself would always be a comfort to her, and relieve Mrs. Evans of a large share of trouble. Now, do you fancy that is the sort of position you would like to fill?"

As Mr. Evans' intention broke on her mind, Leona's heart throbbed with joy. She had never dreamt of such good luck as this: to be taken back into the very house she had been obliged to fly from, and in a position where there would be less probability, perhaps, than in any other of the discovery of her identity. To be able to prosecute her search in the quarter where she would be most likely to obtain information—the kitchen floor—and at the same time to be intimate with the upper storeys, and close to him whom she had no doubt was already installed in the place she had left vacant in the household. She could

hardly believe in her good fortune. Her eyes sparkled with the delight of success, and her pleasure was apparent.

"Indeed, sir," commenced she, "there is *nothing* I should like better."

"I am glad to hear you say so, Miss Gibson. Mrs. Evans and I have been talking for some time past of the necessity of getting some one for the purpose I have named, and I see no reason why you should not fulfil our requirements. Your name is sufficient guarantee for your character. With respect to your duties, my wife can better inform you than myself; but your salary will be liberal—eighty pounds a year."

Again Leona was pleasantly taken by surprise. Why this unusual salary for a head servant, unless some sinister motive lay beneath the generosity?

"You are, indeed, very good, sir," she replied, "and if I can do all that Miss Evans

will require of me, I shall be but too happy to accept the situation."

"Very well, then; consequent on Mrs. Evans' approval (of which I have no doubt), we will consider that matter settled. But I have a little bargain to make with you concerning it, Miss Gibson."

"What is that, sir?"

"That the subject on which you have spoken to me to-day—the story of—of—Mr. Anson's unfortunate death, shall never be mentioned in my house. It is needless to tell you that Miss Lucy *knows nothing of her parents.* She believes herself to be my child, and not a hint must be breathed in her presence to upset that conviction. If, as you say, *you know all,* you must be aware of the urgent necessity there is for *concealing the name of her father from her.*"

"Of course I am aware of it, sir."

"It would be putting her to useless shame,

to torture, to misery, to let her know it!" continued Mr. Evans, covering his face with his hands.

"I quite agree with you," replied Leona.

He looked up, half frightened of this woman, who professed to know everything, and took it all so calmly. Intuitively he felt that she was not deceiving him in saying so—that his family secrets *were* in her possession, and that it behoved him to conciliate her as much as possible.

"I am glad of that. I felt, as soon as I saw you, Miss Gibson, that you would not only perceive the necessity for caution, but preserve it out of the goodness of your heart. We will make this bargain with each other, then; that my house shall be your home under the circumstances we have already alluded to, and that in return you will preserve an inviolable secrecy with regard to the past. It is all done and finished with, Miss Gibson, and can never

be undone. It is far better to bury it in silence."

"You are doubtless right, sir," she said evasively.

"My next condition is, Miss Gibson, that the person we mentioned—if, as you say, still living—does not come to my house without my knowledge."

"That I can safely promise you, so far as it is in my power to prevent it."

"Perhaps it is wrong of me to say I am sorry to hear that Rebecca Levitt is still alive, Miss Gibson; but I heard, and I hoped, that she had died many years ago. For all our sakes—and especially for Lucilla's—you must see it would be better we should never meet again. She has been silent, and apparently willing to forego all her claims upon us so long, that I concluded death had ended her troubles. But since it is not the case, it would be extremely impolitic of her to rake up old matters anew."

"Her claim is a very strong one, sir," remarked Leona, putting out thereby what is termed "a feeler."

"Well; yes—yes. I acknowledge that. But still the question is: What *good* can she do herself by bringing it forward? And especially if she is married. Would it not be wiser for every reason to let the matter rest?"

"*I* should think so, sir. And with poor Mr. George away, too, or dead—no one knows which——"

"Dead, Miss Gibson, dead. There is no doubt, after all these years, of my poor brother being dead. If I thought otherwise—if I *could* think otherwise——" continued Mr. Evans, with unmistakable agitation in his voice.

"And yet there's many a one returns, sir, who has been given up for dead by his friends and relations."

"Don't speak of it, Miss Gibson; pray don't speak of it," he continued, in the same

tone, "or you will utterly unfit me for business. That old grief can never be forgotten, but we have not mentioned it for years. Your coming has unfortunately revived its memory, but I trust this is the last time you will allude to it. I will be frank with you. My firm is, as you know, one of the most prosperous in England. My position in society is by no means despicable, and I have considerable wealth at my command with which to keep it up. Under these circumstances you must be aware how detrimental the propagation of such a scandal as we have been talking of would prove to my name, both in business and in fashionable circles, let alone the sorrow which the remembrance causes me. You will therefore oblige me if from this hour you entirely drop the subject. I never wish to hear it mentioned, nor even alluded to in the remotest manner. And, in consideration of which, it shall be my care

to see that you want for nothing, whether in my house or out of it. Are we perfectly agreed on this matter, Miss Gibson?"

Leona was anything but perfectly agreed to a bond that must render all the trouble she had taken futile, but she could not affect even to appear to differ from her supposed patron. So she got over the difficulty in some clever, shifting, feminine way, and took her leave, bound to appear before Mr. and Mrs. Evans the same evening, and make the final arrangements for taking up her abode with them. As she left the presence of her uncle, and found herself in the glaring streets again, Leona could hardly believe in her good luck. As the door closed upon her retreating figure, Mr. Evans rubbed his hands, and congratulated himself on his diplomacy. It was a complete case of "diamond cut diamond." It had been agreed between them, in the course of their conversation, that she would

call in and see Mrs. Evans that same evening. So, a little after eight o'clock Leona presented herself at the familiar door, and heard through the open windows the sounds of laughter and talking from the dinner-table at which she had so lately sat a welcome guest. She was shown into a small study on the ground-floor, where in a few minutes Mrs. Evans found her. The little lady, generally so brisk and lively, looked less so than usual, Leona imagined, as she walked demurely into the room, and begged her to be reseated in the chair from which she had risen.

"My husband tells me he has already, in some measure, explained to you the kind of person we require to attend upon Miss Evans. She has a maid to keep her wardrobe in order, and dress and undress her. But she is, unfortunately, in very delicate health, and often lies awake at night. We want some one, therefore, to be more of a companion

than a servant, to read to her when she is restless, to see she takes her medicine regularly, to accompany her occasionally in her drives, and to be near her when she lies upon the sofa."

"To wait upon her, in fact, madam, as a mother or a sister might wait upon her, were she dangerously ill."

"Just so, Miss Gibson. I see you perfectly understand what we require. I do a great deal of it myself, but I have my house and my friends to look after, and cannot be always by Miss Lucy's side. Sometimes, I fear, you may find her rather fractious—her illness, which arises from a weakness of the spine, is apt to make her so. And added to that, I much regret to say that the dear girl has experienced a great disappointment lately. But that has nothing to do with our engagement, nor would the story possess any interest for you."

"Anything which affects Miss Evans' health will possess, I hope, for the future, an interest for me, madam; but where there is no necessity for my hearing her private affairs, or those of any of the family, it is best they should remain untold."

Mrs. Evans was enchanted with this reply. She thought she had never met with any person who impressed her so much at first sight with her judgment and propriety as Miss Gibson did.

"There is one thing I am rather puzzled about," were the next words she said, "and that is, how I am to manage about your meals, Miss Gibson. My husband tells me you know his family well," she went on frankly, "and so you must know that I am country bred and born, and have not much knowledge of town customs. I should wish to make you as comfortable as possible, and to do everything that is right, if you will just tell me what are

your ideas upon the subject. Of course I couldn't think of asking you to take your meals in the servants'-hall, but I am afraid you will be lonely eating them by yourself; and it is only on her worst days that Miss Lucilla takes hers in her bedroom. Now, what will be the best arrangement to make about it?"

The question was put so ingenuously that it did not seem unnatural that Leona should slightly deliberate before answering it, and during those few minutes of delay she reviewed her forces as a general reviews his troops, and decided on the servants'-hall.

"I will not deny, madam," she replied, "that I am unused to the society of my inferiors. My appearance and manner will have told you as much already. But since I have consented, and with the utmost gratitude to you for the offer—to enter your family in the capacity of a sick nurse to Miss Evans, I

would prefer to take up my proper position in the household. Were I to take my meals alone I should only excite the envy and distrust of the servants, neither am I fond of eating by myself. With your permission then I will dine in the hall with the others."

"I think you have come to a very sensible conclusion, Miss Gibson, though I should not have ventured to propose it. You will find all my servants respectable and superior people. Mrs. Raymond, the housekeeper, is especially so."

"And now may I venture to ask, madam, how soon you wish me to enter upon my duties?"

"Whenever you please, Miss Gibson, to-night or to-morrow. It is all the same to me. We are rather in confusion just now, our housekeeper being laid up, and two guests having arrived unexpectedly yesterday."

"Can I be of any use in filling her place?"

"I daresay you might. It is very good of you to propose it. But I should never dream of asking you to do anything more than I have already mentioned."

"I shall be glad to make myself useful in any way in return for your kindness," replied Leona. And then it was agreed between them that she should enter upon her service the following day, and consider that her salary commenced from the same date.

As Mrs. Evans, in her familiar countrified manner, was showing her out of the hall door, Leona heard that of the dining-room open, and caught a glimpse of a file of men in evening dress taking their way upstairs. There was Mr. Evans, who did not at that moment seem to wish to recognise her; there were the everlasting Captain Rivers and Tom Hastings; and lastly came Don Guzman, and a slight figure, the sight of whose back alone made

Leona's heart throb with mingled pain and pleasure.

"Are you suffering? Your face is so suffused," said kind Mrs. Evans, as she noticed Miss Gibson's complexion change.

"It is only the heat, madam. Even at this hour of the day there seems to be scarcely a breath of wind."

"You may well say so. It is stifling. We were thinking of sending Miss Lucy to the seaside next week, and now that you are coming to look after her I imagine we are certain to do so. Good evening. Any time to-morrow that is most convenient to yourself will do for us. Good night. Good-bye."

And so she was kindly dismissed.

When she reached the next turning she stood against some railings for a few minutes, just to recover herself.

Oh, it was hard—bitterly hard—to see him and not to speak to him! Leona's heart was

bursting to know everything that concerned himself and her. How he had passed his convalescence—if he had discovered the trick she had played upon him—what Dona Josefa had said upon the subject—above all, what *he* had thought or believed.

Now that she had seen him again, that she knew he was within a few yards of her, it seemed incredible that she could have been satisfied to remain without news of him three long months. He—her brother—her Tobal! The boy who had played with her from childhood—the man who had been her nearest friend and counsellor and companion!

But she was going to live in the same house with him. That thought was a balm to all her present ill. To-morrow she should sleep under the same roof as Tobal—should hear his name, perhaps his voice, and see his face every hour!

Leona went home to the hotel where she

had stayed the night before, and slept long and well under the sense of that conviction.

* * * * *

Meanwhile, Don Christobal Valera, who had come to England immediately on the receipt of the news by the New York firm of the fraud that had been perpetrated in their name upon their London correspondents, was receiving from Mr. Evans a full, true, and particular account of every circumstance connected with the mysterious appearance and disappearance of the young man who had assumed his name and presented his letters of introduction.

"Such a nice boy as we all thought him," said Mrs. Evans. "The only thing that ever struck me about him as strange was his extreme youth. He professed to be two-and-twenty, but he did not look more than eighteen—if so much."

"You will pardon my great curiosity, I

hope, upon the subject," replied Don Christobal, "but you must be aware it possesses an overpowering interest for me. Would you mind describing to me over again, as minutely as you can, every detail of the appearance of this impostor?"

"I can tell you to a T, Valera," interposed Captain Rivers, who had taken as great a fancy to the real Simon Pure as he had taken a dislike to the false one. "He was un undersized, flabby little beast, with fat white hands, pink cheeks, a rosebud mouth, and every other description of horror. He used to loll about with the women all day, and boast tremendously of achievements which he never saw, and——"

"Stop, Rivers!" said Mr. Evans; "you are unjust in your description. You never liked the lad, and you are prejudiced against him. But Valera desires an accurate knowledge of his appearance, remember, for other

purposes than the gratification of personal spite. Our firm and his have been deceived and cheated by this pretended Spanish correspondent, and we want to discover the offender, and bring him to justice."

"The sooner the better, I should say," grumbled the captain, *sotto voce.*

"Had he not been so effeminate-looking, the young man would really have been handsome," continued Mr. Evans, turning to Valera, "for he had beautiful features."

"What coloured hair and eyes?"

"A deep red or chestnut colour, and very thick and curly. I am speaking of his hair. As for his eyes it is not so easy to describe them. I am not much in the habit of looking at people's eyes, but I could not help noticing Valera's—I beg your pardon, Don—it's difficult to drop calling the impostor by his assumed name. They were the most peculiar eyes I have ever seen, large and long, of

precisely the same colour as his hair, only with black eyebrows and lashes, and the most extraordinary yellow light about them."

"A yellow light!" cried Valera, suddenly. "How very peculiar. I never heard of such a thing before," he added a moment after, in a sedater tone.

"Nor I. I used to look at the boy with astonishment. His eyes seemed to change like a panther's. Sometimes they looked as black as night, at others, clear as amber. Where are you going, Don?" he continued, as the young man left his side and walked in a bewildered manner towards the open window.

"Only for a breath of fresh air. Your cramped atmosphere chokes me, monsieur," said Christobal, as he leant his feverish brow against the sill, and gazed up into the dark-blue star-spangled sky.

The stars seemed to look back upon him

with their yellow light, and confirm the suspicion that had arisen in his mind.

"Black as night, clear as amber," he repeated to himself. "As sure as those stars never change their lustre, those eyes must have belonged to *her*. Yet Leona *here*—in the country she vowed she never would visit, as an impostor in name, and sex, and position, as a defrauder of *my* rights, the rights of *me* whom I thought she so much loved. *Madre di Dios!* I would sacrifice every prospect I have in the world, sooner than believe it true."

CHAPTER V.

A NOVEL POSITION.

"CARAMBA," cried Don Guzman, "the description answers pretty accurately to the appearance of that little friend of yours, Valera, who nearly gave me my quietus on our road to New York. *Sapristi!* I shall never forget the coolness with which that lad put a bullet into me. And all because I had doubted the purity of your Spanish blood. Can it be Leon d'Acosta that has been personating you? You told me you had lost sight of him lately."

"The same idea has passed through my brain," said Christobal. "And yet I cannot think it possible."

"Why not? The boy had an affectionate

heart and plenty of courage; but our own welfare is always the first consideration with us."

"Not with—with *him*," replied Valera.

"It is strange," remarked Mr. Evans, "that I never had any doubt about this young fellow from the beginning. I am generally considered ''cute' enough in business matters, but he completely took me in. He had such a refined courtier-like air about him, and made himself so general a favourite. As for the women," continued Mr. Evans in a lower voice, "he made complete fools of them —what with his acting and his singing."

"Did he act well, this boy, as if he had been used to it?" demanded Valera.

"Splendidly. He took us all by surprise one night at a friend's honse. I don't care much for such things myself, but I confess he astonished me. And he had a very fine voice too, and sang to his guitar in several languages.

He spoke English as well, if not better than you do yourself, Don."

"Did he appear familiar with the Brazils?"

"Perfectly so, and from what you tell me, with every particular concerning your family and antecedents. I think he must, at some time or other, have been intimate with yourself or your friends."

"Tell us how it was you lost your letters of introduction, Valera," said Guzman. "How did they go? When did you first miss them?"

"Well, that I can hardly tell you. Just as I had received them from the firm I fell dangerously ill of typhoid fever, and know nothing that happened for weeks afterwards."

"*Après?*"

"As soon as I was well enough I was taken away to the country for change of air and thought no more of letters until I was told

they had been already presented in England by someone assuming my name."

"And have you no idea *who* had an opportunity of getting at your private papers?" said Mr. Evans.

"There was no *man* associated with me at the time," replied Christobal, evasively.

"May I ask who nursed you during your illness?"

"My mother and a female friend of hers. As far as I know, no one else touched anything that belonged to me."

"It is all very mysterious," said Mr. Evans; "and even if we catch the lad, I don't see what we can do to punish him. He has defrauded no one as yet. He had not the time to do it. I suppose he must have received some intimation of your arrival before he left here, for he and I had had some private conversation that morning——"

"I wish you wouldn't talk so loud, Henry,"

said Mrs. Evans, coming up to them. "Your voice reaches the other end of the room, and poor Lucy is listening to every word you say. If you *must* talk about that horrible, deceitful, wicked young man, take Don Valera into the conservatory."

"All right," replied Mr. Evans, obediently, as he moved away with his guest. "You will understand, Valera, that under ordinary circumstances I should not repose in you, or anyone, the confidence I am about to do now; but I consider it is necessary you should know all. On the very morning this impostor left us, I had been talking to him on the subject of my daughter and himself."

"Had he presumed to—to—*address* Miss Evans, then?"

"He had, as she believed it. Any way, there was a sort of understanding between them; and my daughter, being a very spoilt child, made herself ill by fretting after him,

so I thought it time to put in my oar. We had a long conversation on the subject."

"And what *did* he say?" asked Valera, curiously. He would have burst out laughing in his host's face, believing as he had commenced to believe, had his mind not been too mournfully exercised on his own account. As it was, he had difficulty in appearing as serious as he should have done.

"He seemed startled at first, as though he had hardly expected such a communication on my part. When I had made him fully understand my meaning, he appeared—as I have no difficulty in believing now that he felt—extremely flattered. He acknowledged the preference he experienced for Miss Evans; and in consequence, believing it was all right, I reposed a confidence in him which I much regret to have parted with. Notwithstanding that, I promised it should be all straight sailing for him. I remember now that I was

rather surprised at the diffidence with which he met my offer. I suppose the young rascal had received some intimation of your arrival, and knew that under any circumstances he would not be able to keep up the ball much longer."

"Did he agree to marry your daughter, then?" demanded Valera.

"Well, not exactly. He shilly-shallied with the subject, and I ascribed his hesitation to his modesty. He said he was engaged to spend a few days with some friends at Streatham, and asked leave to postpone further discussion of the subject till his return. Of course I assented. I had no wish to force my daughter on him. All I wanted was to secure her peace of mind. *The scoundrel!*" added Mr. Evans, angrily.

"I hope Miss Evans has not felt his defection much?"

"She could not but feel it, Don. She is

very sickly, and spends most of her time on her back, and this fellow had made himself almost necessary to her. She has plenty of friends, but his gentle ways and winning manners suited her nervous temperament better, I suppose, than the roughness of most men. She fretted more than enough at his going to Streatham. When we discovered he had never been there I thought she would have had a serious illness from suspense, and your arrival has been the crowning blow. I insist upon her mixing in society, because I know solitude is the worst thing for her, but I do not know what mischief may not be silently working in her system the while. The fellow deserves to have his neck wrung."

"Might not change of scene prove beneficial to Miss Evans?" said Christobal, unwilling to discuss the advisability of wringing the neck of the unknown impostor.

"My wife and I have talked of it more than

once, but the girl is unwilling to go. However, we have lately secured the services of a very nice and respectable attendant for her, with whom we think she may be induced to visit the seaside. A family is a great responsibility, Don Valera. You are fortunate in not having, as yet, encumbered yourself with one."

"I do not know what would become of my very slender and uncertain prospects if I had," replied Christobal, with a laugh that broke off in something very like a sigh.

* * * * *

When Leona returned to the Evans' house on the following day, she felt herself to be a person of some little importance. She knew that Mr. Evans would have repeated to his wife all that he knew concerning her, with a caution respecting the treatment he wished her to receive, and that in her turn Mrs. Evans would have communicated his sentiments, more or less, to the servants of the household. She

was not surprised therefore on presenting herself to find that the footman ushered her into a private room, where she was presently joined by her new mistress, and welcomed with every appearance of cordiality.

"Mr. Evans and I have been laying our heads together, Miss Gibson, and come to the conclusion that, if it is agreeable to yourself, you and Mrs. Raymond had better take your meals together in her little sitting-room upstairs. I am sure you will like Mrs. Raymond, she has been in our family forty years, and is a most good-tempered, chatty old lady. Will you come up and see her at once (she is confined to her room, as I told you, with the gout), or will you be introduced to Miss Lucy?"

"I will do whichever is most agreeable to yourself, madam."

"Then I think it will be pleasanter for you to take off your bonnet and make yourself

comfortable first, Miss Gibson, and when you have had a cup of tea you can come to my room. This way." And, going before her, Mrs. Evans trotted up the staircase until they reached and entered the housekeeper's apartment. Although Leona knew but little of the domestic life of servants, and the style of their treatment in England, she had kept her eyes sufficiently open to be aware that, for the station she had assumed, her reception was a very unusual one. Her statements then to her uncle had had the desired effect. He was afraid of what she might have to disclose. He dreaded the old story being raked up again. What might he not have to dread when she had found out and sounded Rebecca Levitt, or Antoine? For to discover this woman's whereabouts, and to hear all the evidence she might be able to bring to bear upon the subject of Abraham Anson's murder, was Leona's next design.

Mrs. Raymond received her more cordially than might have been anticipated of one head servant welcoming another. The truth is, the old housekeeper had seen her day, and was thankful for the prospect of any help in her duties. She had been too long with the Evans to feel jealous of an interloper. She knew (and for the same reason that made the security of the new comer) that whatever happened she would never be deposed from the place she held in their household. They could not afford to offend so old a servant. So, after a careful scrutiny, that resulted in a grunt of satisfaction, Mrs. Raymond made Miss Gibson welcome to her sanctum, and gave her such a cup of afternoon tea as only housekeepers and such as have the run of the storeroom know how to brew for themselves.

The first conversation between the two women ran naturally upon Miss Lucilla, and

the shameful manner in which she had been treated by the "furrin young gentleman." Mrs. Raymond did not restrain her tongue during the discussion. She had evidently been made cognisant of the position Miss Gibson had formerly held towards the family, and assumed that she must be perfectly *au fait* with everything that concerned its members. She animadverted freely enough on the conduct of the supposed Valera, and the scandalous manner in which he had eventually "cut and run"—"just for all the world, my dear, like a life-guardsman on leave that I was engaged to be married to when I was a girl—the handsomest creature as ever you saw, with blue eyes and fair hair, and standing six foot two in his stockings, if he stood an inch—and who borrowed ten pounds of my poor father on account of the expenses of the wedding trip, and then ran away and rejoined his regiment, and we never could

get no satisfaction out of him afterwards—never!"

"But this young gentleman hasn't robbed anyone, has he?" demanded Leona, trembling for her own honour. If Mrs. Raymond had answered "Yes," she would scarcely have been able to avoid betraying herself by a denial.

"Bless you, no, my dear; and he had one of the nicest faces as you ever set eyes on, with beautiful brown eyes. What coloured eyes are yours?" demanded Mrs. Raymond, suddenly interrupting herself as she turned about and confronted her new acquaintance.

"They're of a brownish colour, too, but very weak," replied Miss Gibson, as she resumed the spectacles she had laid aside for a moment. "I can't bear the light upon them at all."

"Bad for needlework, I should say," suggested the housekeeper.

"Very bad," replied Leona, who, possessing

little or no skill with her needle, was delighted at having found an excuse that should absolve her from exhibiting her deficiency in that respect.

"Well, it's a pity, but it doesn't much signify here," said Mrs. Raymond, "because Miss Lucy's maid looks after her wardrobe, and I expect you're to be more of a companion than a servant to her."

"I believe so, from what Mrs. Evans told me."

"She said the same to me, and that you knew pretty near as much of the family as I do. That's why I was going to mention the poor young gentleman's eyes to you. I can't keep from calling him poor, because he did remind me so of Master George. His eyes were the very moral of his."

"That's strange, isn't it, when they were no relation to each other?"

"Well, I don't know. Your eyes remind

me of Mr. Valera's, too, though you never heard of him before to-day. It is the colour, I suppose, that makes the resemblance. Although, I must say, I used to be foolish enough to wonder to myself if that poor boy could be any kith or kin to our Mr. George."

"Why, Mrs. Raymond, how could he have been?" cried Leona, looking and feeling really startled by the housekeeper's suspicion.

"Well, my dear, I daresay it was only an old woman's fancy, but the likeness at times was powerful. And you see, Mr. George went to foreign parts, and this lad, he came from foreign parts; and though we've heard nothing of our poor dear since he left England, and don't know if he's dead or alive, still, anyway, he might have left a family behind him—but there, I'm foolish, and don't you get repeating a word of what I've said to Mrs. Evans or Miss Lucy, or I shall never hear the end of it."

"Don't be afraid. I shall repeat nothing. Only you know the rumour there was about Mr. George before he left England, and I should think he would scarcely have married in the face of it."

"Lor, my dear! I said nothing about marriage. And who do you think would marry a poor creature with a curse upon him like that. It was only my nonsense, no doubt; but I must say, the first time I caught a good sight of Mr. Valera, he took my heart away."

"Can you give me Rebecca Levitt's address?" said Leona, trying to speak naturally, and as though the answer were of no moment to her.

"No, I can't," replied Mrs. Raymond, sharply; "and if I could I wouldn't. She's been dead and buried, so I hear, these ten years past; and dead or alive we don't want her about this house again. She's brought

misfortune enough into it for one lifetime, I should think, and I wonder at any calling themselves friends of the master's taking the trouble even to mention her name."

"I am sure I beg your pardon," said Leona, humbly. "I have no more reason to like Rebecca Levitt than you have; but I've cause to believe she's not dead, because I was speaking with some of her relations only the other day in Liverpool."

"Well, 'tis a pity she ain't dead then," rejoined the housekeeper, "for a more deceitful hussy never breathed. I wish the whole family had been drowned in the Red Sea before we had set eyes on them. They're at the bottom of all the misery we've ever had."

"Yet Mr. Evans employs some of the Levitts still in his house at Liverpool."

"He has his own reasons for that, my dear, as you may well believe. But I don't think he could stand even the name of that

Becky being mentioned before him again. That's the bell to Miss Lucy's room. Mrs. Evans said she would ring it when she wanted you. If you've quite done your tea, perhaps you'd better go."

Miss Lucy's room was a pretty little boudoir, opening from her sleeping apartment, and where she usually spent her mornings. Leona had often passed an hour there with her guitar, and her heart smote her sensibly as she entered it now, and saw poor Lucilla stretched upon the couch, looking so feeble, and languid, and worn out. Mrs. Evans was seated by her daughter's side.

"This is Miss Gibson, my love," she said, as Leona made her appearance. "Will you let her sit with you whilst I run down to your papa? You can tell her just what you want."

"Yes," replied Lucilla, wearily.

"Take a chair by the side of the sofa, if

you please, Miss Gibson, and keep the flies off Miss Evans with this fan. Her handkerchief and eau-de-cologne bottle are on that table, and there is lemonade in the ice-cooler in the corner. You will be sure and tell Miss Gibson all you may want, love, won't you?"

"Yes," repeated the girl, in the same tone.

"Some friends may come up to see her by-and-by, Miss Gibson. You must admit them or not, according to her orders. I shall not be gone more than an hour. Good-bye, dear Lucilla." And with a kiss to the invalid, Mrs. Evans trotted out of the room.

"Can I do anything for you, miss?" said Leona, as she approached the sofa.

"Nothing, thank you," replied Lucilla, with closed eyes.

Leona took Mrs. Evans' vacated seat, and commenced to fan the languid invalid. As she was thus employed she examined her with interest, and was shocked to see how great an

alteration her disappointment had made in her. Lucy's face had always been pale—now it was drawn and sallow, and the dark, leaden-tinted circles round her eyes showed how many tears the poor child had shed over the defalcation of her supposed lover.

Leona had never professed to feel more than friendship for Lucilla; but her conscience smote her as she remembered that but for the deception she had practised, her sentiments could never have been misinterpreted. With all her courage, and determination, and apparent insensibility to the feelings of others, our heroine had a kind heart, and she felt terribly sorry for the ludicrous error into which Lucilla had fallen; and her sorrow gave birth to a desire to relieve it.

If she could manage to engage the girl's attention (so Leona argued to herself), and gain some influence over the girl's mind, she might, with the many opportunities of con-

verse open to her, continue to undo some of the mischief she had caused. The fancy Lucilla had taken for her in her masquerading costume being but one-sided, was not likely to prove lasting; and there was Dr. Hastings, as Leona well knew from former observation, ready to step into the breach, and offer his patient all the consolation in his power. As she sat and silently examined the havoc fretting had made in the girl's appearance, Leona resolved to do all she could to favour Dr. Hastings' suit. But to attain that end she must first win Lucy's liking and confidence.

She was roused from her reverie by finding that her charge's eyes had opened, and were fixed upon her face.

"I don't want any more fanning, thank you. It chills me. Why does mamma say I knew you when I was a little girl? I never saw your face before."

"Oh yes, miss, you did! Down at Mrs.

Gibson's, in Sussex, years ago. Don't you remember Jane Gibson?"

"No, I do not," replied Lucilla, shaking her head. "You must be mistaken. I never forget a face that I have once seen. And there was only Mrs. Gibson there and a woman —I forget the name we used to call her— Watson, or Walters, or something like that."

"Wallis, you mean," interposed her companion; "an old servant, Wallis. She is still living at Willowside with my aunt."

"Yes, that was her name, I remember now. So you must have been at Willowside at some time, but not with me."

"Oh yes I was! but it was so long ago you have forgotten me, Miss Lucilla."

"I never forget faces," repeated Lucilla emphatically; "and you were not at Willowside at the same time that I was."

Leona became somewhat alarmed at this obstinacy, which might lead to unpleasant

inquiries. She was so unused to children, and their ways, that she had miscalculated the strength of a child's memory, and she did not quite see her way out of this fresh difficulty. But her mother-wit came to her assistance. She knew if she removed the spectacles she wore that Lucilla would see something familiar in her eyes, for which, from her dress and gray hair, she would be unable to give a tangible reason. And from the confused memory that would follow Leona thought she saw the means of convincing her of the truth of her own assertion.

"I am sorry I should have passed so completely out of your mind, Miss Lucilla," she answered, "but I know the reason why. I had brown hair in those days and strong eyes, now my hair is nearly white, and I am compelled to wear glasses. I think if I remove them you will have less difficulty in recognising me."

She suited the action to the word, and

Lucilla gazed on the eyes she had so lately decided to be the most beautiful in the world. But crow's-feet had been delicately pencilled at the corner of each eyelid, and the black brows above were nearly white, so that her first glance elicited a little cry of pained surprise, the second mystified her. She felt that she had, and yet she had *not*, seen them, and the face to which they belonged, before. And the consequent confusion that ensued in her mind, brought about the very result that Leona had anticipated. Lucilla could not decide for herself, so she was fain to accept the decision of another.

"You know me now, you see," remarked Miss Gibson.

"I suppose I do," replied Lucilla, in a wondering kind of way. "Your face looks familiar to me, and yet I cannot associate it with Willowside, nor have I any idea where I have seen it before."

"You were such a mere child at that time, remember."

"I suppose that must be it, yet it seems strange I should forget. Perhaps you were not always in the house, Miss Gibson."

"I was in and out, and about. I remember you perfectly, Miss Lucilla, and so does Wallis. My poor old aunt is too foolish now to remember anybody."

"Hark!" interposed Lucilla, "was not that a knock at the door? It must be the doctor. Let him in, Miss Gibson, please."

And Leona, rising hastily and letting the spectacles, to which she was so unaccustomed, fall from her lap, went forward to do her new mistress's bidding, and found herself face to face with *Christobal Valera!*

CHAPTER VI.

LEONA IS DISCOVERED.

As the door opened their four eyes met, and in that moment he recognised her. He had no time to take in the details of her costume: the eminently respectable black silk dress; the primitive collar and cuffs, and the old-fashioned cap with lilac ribbons that adorned her head. He had no time to mark the gray wig—the white eyebrows—the painted wrinkles—he saw only Leona's eyes, those eyes that were so unlike any other eyes on earth; those rich, fathomless brown orbs, with the restless light playing across them, like sunshine glistening through a thick tracery of leaves. Lucilla had not been able to recognise them, because

even had she stayed to consider *whose* eyes they resembled she would only have sighed at the memory they recalled, and been quite unable to associate the appearance of this middle-aged woman with the fascinating youth whose loss she deplored. But Christobal had seen and studied Leona's countenance under every sort of disguise. She would not have been able to deceive him by her male attire, nor directly her eyes met his could the supposed Miss Gibson keep up her *incognita*. And as recognition flew to his face and made it glow with sudden pleasure and surprise, Leona saw as plainly as he did that she was recognised. And yet the space of time occupied by a flash of lightning might have covered what it has taken so many words to put down on paper.

"*M'amie!*" he exclaimed, without the slightest disguise, and as she heard the word Leona believed that all was over with her. But the next moment Christobal had recovered

himself, and though our heroine was trembling from head to foot her courage did not desert her.

"This is Miss Evans' room, sir. Do you wish to see her?"

"*Pardon!* yes!" he answered. "I was commissioned by Madame Evans to bring these flowers"—intimating a large bouquet he carried in his hand—"to mademoiselle, and to ask if it is her pleasure to drive in the Park this evening."

"It is Don Valera, Miss Lucy," said Leona, turning to the couch. "Do you wish to see him?"

"Oh yes! Let him come in," said Lucy, indifferently. She had heard the exclamation he had given vent to on first meeting Miss Gibson, but it had conveyed no meaning to her ears. She knew neither French nor Spanish sufficiently well even to understand to which language the expression belonged; and

she was so accustomed to hear the numerous foreigners that frequented her father's house using their native idioms, that if she noticed it at all, it was only to wonder whether Don Valera was taking an oath, or uttering a prayer to his favourite saint. So that the visitor was permitted to enter, and whilst he was paying the usual amount of compliments a man considers due to the daughter of the house he is staying at, Leona's agitation had leisure to subside, and she could think of the best means to prevent Christobal further betraying her identity. Not but what she believed that, once assured of her wish, he would respect it; but she had everything to explain to him, and she feared that his impatience might make him forgetful of the harm he might do her by his indiscretion. She knew that, having once detected her in a false position, Christobal would never rest until he had learned the truth, and that the sooner she could give him an inter-

view the better. So, with her back turned towards the couch where they were conversing together, she tore a leaf from her pocket-book and hastily scribbled on it, in Spanish:

"Be silent—be patient—for the love of God, and I will tell you all. This evening, when they go out in the carriage, I shall remain in this room."

She crushed the paper in the palm of her hand, and held it so, waiting.

In a few minutes Don Valera rose to go. He was evidently making a great effort to speak lightly; but Leona could detect the nervous tremor in his voice.

"Then, mademoiselle, I am to convey to madame your consent to dine with her this evening?"

"Oh yes! if mamma wishes it I will go. It is all the same to me," replied Lucilla.

"Pardon, mademoiselle, but I venture to surmise you will not find it all the same when

you get out of this warm room into the cool fresh air. It is very charming in the Park to-day."

"Perhaps you will accompany us, Don?"

"With pleasure, mademoiselle, if I gain the consent of madame. I will go then and tell her that you will be ready—how soon?"

"In half an hour."

"In half an hour. *Au revoir*," said Valera, as he bowed and prepared to quit the room. Leona walked swiftly to the door and held it open for him. As he passed through it he gave her a glance that cut her to the soul. She responded to it by thrusting the piece of paper in his hand.

Then he turned and looked back upon her from the landing, and had she obeyed the impulse of her heart, she could have run forward and clasped her arms about his neck, and cried for joy at seeing him again. But the exigencies of her position were strong upon her,

and she shrunk backwards instead, and closed the door upon him.

"If you'll open the second long drawer of that wardrobe, Miss Gibson, you'll find a pale-blue walking costume and bonnet. I'll wear them to-day. Will you do my hair before I leave the sofa? Thank you. How nice and firm and plump your hands are. They're just like a girl's. And you brush hair beautifully. You seem to brush all the pain out of my head. I should have it done, frequently, only my maid pulls at my hair and tangles it so, that it is pain instead of pleasure. But your touch is wonderfully soothing."

"I am so glad you find it so, Miss Lucilla. I know what a good effect brushing the hair has upon nervous pain. I will try the effect of it when you are restless. It might often send you to sleep at night."

"I think it might, but I should not like

to give you so much trouble. What do you think of the gentleman who was here just now, Miss Gibson? He is considered to be very handsome."

"I think he *is* handsome, Miss Lucilla, for a foreigner. But you don't think there are many men like Englishmen, I'm sure."

"Indeed I do! There was a young gentleman staying with us the other day"—here poor Lucy stopped and sighed—"he was a Spaniard too, like Don Valera, and he was the handsomest man I've ever seen in my life."

"Indeed, miss. What was he like?"

"Oh! he had such beautiful hair," cried Lucy, delighted to find a new listener for the topic that absorbed her. "A kind of a deep chestnut colour, and a straight nose, and such glorious eyes, and teeth as white as pearls, and such pretty little hands and feet."

"Dear me, miss! that seems more like the description of a young lady than a gentleman

to me. A man should be broad and lusty, and tanned by the weather; and have good strong limbs to protect himself and others with. I am afraid the young gentleman you speak of couldn't have been of much good out of a drawing-room."

"Oh! but he sang divinely, Miss Gibson, and played the guitar, and acted so well; in fact I think he could do everything."

"Well, Miss Lucilla, I should like to see your paragon, though I don't fancy I should hold him of much account beside a gentleman like Dr. Hastings, for instance."

"Dr. Hastings! Why, when did you know him?"

"I don't know him, miss, and I've only seen him once since I've been in the house. But I noticed what a fine, strong, manly gentleman he is, and Mrs. Raymond told me his name. Now he's what *I* call handsome, if you like."

"Tom handsome!" mused Lucilla. "I never even thought of him in that light. But he is very strong. He can carry me as easily as if I were a baby."

"Ah, and as good as he is strong, miss, I am sure. Anyone could see that at a glance. Will the other gentleman be here again soon?"

"What, Don Valera?"

"No; the handsome young gentleman you were speaking of."

"He was Don Valera."

"But is not that the name of the one that visited you just now?"

Lucy saw the error she had made, coloured and hesitated.

"Yes—but——"

"They are brothers, perhaps."

"Oh no. They're no relation to each other, but they have the same name. I don't think he's coming back again—not just yet,

that's to say," continued poor Lucy, rapidly and incoherently—"and——will you please to get me out my parasol, Miss Gibson—and a pair of gloves—and—I think mamma must be ready by this time, if you'll just go and see, and tell her that I'm dressed, and will wait here till the carriage comes round."

Leona saw through the earnest desire to get rid of her, born of poor Lucy's personal fear that she had said more about the defalcant Valera than was either necessary or prudent. She was willing enough to let the subject drop for the present, foreseeing plainly that the foolish little heart would before long unbosom itself again. And she was right. For what she did not know was that Mr. and Mrs. Evans, from a mistaken idea that they were acting for the best, had strictly tabooed the mention of the false Valera's name, and refused to let Lucy discuss the subject of her feelings respecting him with anybody. Consequently

the poor girl's heart, left to brood over her disappointment, was positively bursting to relieve itself by placing confidence in some sympathetic mind.

It is the greatest error possible to suppose that a trouble is increased by discussion. On the contrary, air it freely, and it will probably die a natural death in half the time. It is the pent-up grief that will not expire, but feeds upon the heart until it has drained it of all life and energy. Some people cannot talk of their trouble. So much the worse for them. It proves how deep it lies, how sorely it has wounded. It is like a terribly diseased limb, to uncover which even is agony. But when they can talk, and wish to talk, do not prevent them. Be patient and merciful. Listen to the oft-repeated tale again and again, without a look that shall warn them they have wearied you. Hear how handsome *he* was—how beautiful *she* looked—how divinely each

one of them sung or danced, or wrote, or played—not once, or twice, or a dozen times (that is if you love the narrator), but as often as your tormentor chooses to inflict it upon you —without a sign of impatience, or contempt, or fatigue, and great shall be your reward. For of all the acts of mercy registered in heaven, surely to bear our fellow-creatures' burdens after this fashion must be amongst the highest. The relief of such vent for a broken spirit is incalculable—the want of it renders the burden almost too heavy to bear.

Yet the best of mortals on occasions refuse it to their fellow-sufferers, on the score that it will increase their disappointment to dwell upon it. They betray the merciful exemption they have had from such suffering by the mere idea.

* * * * *

The carriage had rolled away from the door, and, as Leona, peeping behind the blind

of a front window had observed, without Valera. The house in Hyde Park Gardens was now nearly empty. The afternoon visitors had departed; the ladies gone out; the gentlemen not yet returned from their various avocations; and the servants, congregated in the basement, were enjoying the first interval of leisure they had had that day. Leona lingered about Lucilla's room, confident that Valera would join her as soon as ever he considered it prudent to do so.

And he came even sooner than she had anticipated, not creeping silently up the staircase, but with a dash and a bang, as if the whole house belonged to him, that frightened her to hear. Into the room he rushed rapidly, energetically, as if no power on earth should keep him another moment from her side, and, slamming the door behind him, ran forward and clasped her to his heart. Leona had intended to act a little, more for the sake of

any who might overhear their interview than in the cause of prudery; but when she felt Christobal's arms tightly wound about her, and his face laid against her own, every consideration vanished before the knowledge that her dearest friend was with her again, and she cried with joy and excitement.

"*Tobal! Tobalito! mon frère, mon cheri!*" she kept on repeating, in broken tones, as she allowed the young man to embrace her according to his will.

"And so I have found you again, *m'amie!*" he exclaimed, as soon as there was a pause, "after all these weary months of suspense and waiting, and horrible doubt, I have found my sister again. Do you know what you have subjected me to by your silence and mystery, Leona? Do you know how I have suffered, scarcely risen from a sick bed, and unable to gain any tidings of you, except that you had left New York? *Madre di Dios!*

my worst enemy could not have devised a more cruel fate for me than has been inflicted by your hands. Tell me the reason of it! Why did you throw up your engagement at the theatre without letting me know? What influence has drawn you to visit a country to which you have always expressed the greatest antipathy? And why do I find you in my employer's house in a disguise, unbefitting your birth, your beauty, or your profession? There is some terrible mystery in all this, Leona."

"Tobalito! forgive me for all I have made you suffer! I did not forget you. If it had been possible, I would have made you my confidant. But there was no alternative."

"You speak in riddles, *m'amie.*"

"It is so long a story, you must give me time for explanation. I will have no more secrets from you, Tobalito. I will tell you everything, but it must be on one condition."

"Name it, Leona!"

"That you do not in any way attempt to stop me in the path of duty I have chalked out for myself."

"Have I ever attempted to turn you from your duty, *m'amie?*"

"You promise then?"

"Tell me first, why do I find you under this disguise?"

"Because it is necessary to my design. It is not the first I have adopted since coming here. Cannot you guess, Tobal? I am the person who stole your letters, and introduced myself here under your name. I could not accomplish the design I have in hand under that character, so I adopted another in order to enter the house again."

Valera dropped her hand, and sunk into the nearest chair.

"Oh, Leona, Leona!" he murmured, "I suspected this; but I would rather have heard any other confession from your lips."

The girl flung herself at his feet, her gray hair and prim attire contrasting strangely with her ardent eyes and impetuous manner.

"Tobal, speak to me! Where was the great harm of it? I would have died sooner than injure you. But you could not travel at that period; and I knew that as soon as you were fit to do so, the firm would provide you with fresh letters of introduction. The only risk I ran was to myself."

"But why—why, my darling? What object could you have had in undertaking this mad freak? What are you doing in this house? Why have you sunk yourself to the level of a servant?"

"My answer is almost contained in your questions, Tobal. You have known my nature from a little child. Why should I do that which is naturally abhorrent to me unless I had some great and important end in view?"

"What end *can* you have?"

"The most powerful of all—the clearance of my dead father's name from the charge of *murder!*"

At that word Valera started from his chair.

"Leona, you must be dreaming. This is a delusion, an hallucination on your part. Who ever dared to couple M. Lacoste's name with so foul a charge? Why did you not tell me of this before? Whoever he had been, even to a king upon his throne, he should have retracted the calumny, or felt the power of a Spaniard's revenge."

"Thanks, *mon frère,*" said the girl, quietly, though her eye kindled at the sight of his enthusiasm in her father's cause, "I love you for your championship; but I am the only one who can search out this matter to the end, and I have sworn before heaven not to rest until I have done so. Do you remember what I told you on board the

steamer, Tobal, as we were journeying from Rio to New York, and the reason I gave you for wishing to quit the place where we were born?"

"I do remember, Leona, but I regarded your communications simply as the effect of a heated and youthful imagination."

"There was more in my resolutions than you gave me credit for. And when I got to New York and heard the subject renewed, found that the infamous charges brought against my dear father were well known and far spread; and that his real name and the names of his accusers were common property, the fire of my indignation burned higher than before. Then your letters fell into my hands, and the temptation to use them was too strong. Forgive me, *mon frère*, it is all that I can say. I have made you the only excuses in my power."

"But I am still mystified, *m'amie*.

Granted that your suspicions are correct, and that your poor father was falsely accused of so base a crime, of what earthly avail to you could be the use of letters addressed to the firm of Evans and Troubridge? Why could you not have come to England under your own name and character?"

"Because my father's name was Evans, Christobal; because he was the brother of the man in whose house we now stand; because my uncle has unjustly inherited the property that should have been his; because, as I firmly believe, Henry Evans himself committed the murder for which my poor father suffered a life-long banishment."

"Leona, you must be mad! You cannot think of what you are saying," cried Valera. "For heaven's sake cease these awful accusations, for should you be overheard you may ruin yourself for life."

"My father was ruined for life," replied

Leona, "and his death is at the door of his accusers. Do you think *I*—his daughter—shrink from sharing his fate? I tell you, Christobal, I have sworn the most solemn oath to avenge his memory, and if it led me to the gallows as a reward, I would not falter in my duty."

"I know as well as most men, all the courage of which you are capable, Leona," said Valera, as he wiped the beads of perspiration from his forehead, "but I must have further proofs of the authority on which you are acting before I can approve of your present conduct. You are rash and inexperienced, and may lead yourself into some terrible labyrinth of difficulty, by bringing a false accusation against so eminently respectable a man as Mr. Evans. It is difficult for me to believe on your bare word—though I know *you* believe it—that your father *was* the brother of my employer; still more to think

that the latter could be capable of the criminality you impute to him. And allowing it all to be true, how can a woman like yourself expect to find the means of bringing it home to him? And if you can, will it be advisable to let the world know that your uncle is a murderer?"

"The world thinks my dear father was one!" cried Leona, excitedly. "Am I to let his memory rest under such a blight, in order to spare my uncle? I have made several discoveries since I have been in England, Christobal, and I see my way already to the end. I will tell you everything, from first to last, if you will swear to keep my secret inviolate."

"Should I be justified in doing so?" asked Valera, who, between love, and duty, and honour, was becoming sorely perplexed. "I have been sent over here in a position of trust, and received—notwithstanding the

obstacles you placed in my way—with the greatest hospitality and frankness. Can I remain in this man's house, and receive his confidence, knowing all the time so dark a plot is hatching under his very roof to destroy his respectability?"

Leona's lip curled with indignation.

"*His respectability!* The respectability of an undiscovered assassin! Go on, then, Valera. Act as you think most honourable and best. Betray my identity, my designs, if you will; but you will effect but one object by your intervention."

"And that is——?"

"*Our total separation.* Not for a few months, or a few years—but *forever, and ever, and ever!* I swear it, Tobal—so help me heaven! You have come to the knowledge of my presence here through a mistake, an inadvertence. If you make use of your knowledge to circumvent the fulfilment of

my solemn oath, I will never see you nor speak to you in this life again. Now for your decision."

"Never see me, nor speak to me again in this life! Me, *me*, Leona, who have loved you from your very cradle? Oh, *m'amie!*" exclaimed the young man passionately, as he fell on his knees and clasped her round the waist. "You might threaten me with the gallows sooner. If I lose the whole world for it, I cannot, *cannot* give you up."

CHAPTER VII.

LEONA'S STRATAGEM.

"I KNEW it," cried Leona triumphantly. "I knew that you cared for me too much, Tobalito, to become my worst enemy now."

"Your enemy! As if that word could ever be applicable to me, when every thought of my life has been yours, Leona, and will be until life ends."

The girl stooped down, and kissed the young man in her old frank way upon the forehead.

"You were always my good brother and friend," she murmured, "and I love you, Tobalito. It is agreed then. When you leave this apartment, you go back to the

family circle as utterly unconscious that the person they call 'Miss Gibson' is Leona Lacoste as though you had never seen her before."

"If you say it *must* be so, I shall obey you, Leona. But is there no other course open to us to pursue, *m'amie?*"

"What course should there be?"

"Is it of no use," continued Valera wistfully, "my pleading with you for myself. Of no use my urging the long weeks I have endured of doubt, and suspense, and misery, whilst I have thought you dead or faithless, as a reason for your having a little pity now on me—if not upon yourself?"

"What do you mean, Tobal?" she questioned sharply. "It is you who are speaking in riddles now, and I have no clue to guessing them."

"I mean, dear Leona, that if you are determined to pursue this quest, I want to

share the risk with you. I want to be your right protector as well as your friend, *m'amie.* I want, in fact, *to marry you!*"

She had been holding his two hands in hers till now, but at these words she threw them away, and a look of distaste, mingled with contempt for her companion's weakness, mounted to her speaking face.

"*You want to marry me!*" she repeated incredulously. "When I have just told you that all my thoughts and hopes are set upon the accomplishment of my oath. Are you raving? How *could* you marry me, even were I to consent, under the circumstances?"

"Had I your consent, Leona, the rest would be easy enough. We are not under parents or guardians. We have but to walk into the nearest church and get married."

"*Après?*" said the girl mockingly.

Valera was silent.

"Go on, monsieur," she continued. "Sup-

pose we accomplish this admirable design, what then?"

"It is impossible to talk to you whilst you are in this humour," repeated Valera. "You turn the most serious subject into a jest."

"Pardon me; I was but demanding information. You ask me to become your wife —I, to whom, as I have just informed you, each moment is precious in the pursuit of an inquiry that affects a name far dearer to me than my own. I wish to know in what manner your proposal is intended to alter my designs? How will a marriage with you further it? Shall I bring my father's accusers to justice any the sooner in consequence? Or will my disguise be rendered less difficult or more effective by the change in my name and position?"

"Of course, if you only look upon my offer in that light," said Valera, gloomily, "I have nothing further to urge in its behalf.

I find you here in England, alone, unprotected, and in an equivocal position. I wish to relieve you of all this."

"By what means, monsieur? By obtaining the legal power to force me to give up my design, and appear in my true character. *Merci!*" and with a mock curtesy she turned away from him.

"*M'amie*, you do me wrong. I love you, love you passionately, and you know it; and I ask you to be my wife. Is there any such insult in that, that you turn round upon me like a tiger?"

"You have hinted at such a contingency more than once before, Tobalito, and I have given you my answer. Don't worry me about it again."

He sighed, and she turned and came back to him.

"Come now, my brother, cannot you be satisfied with my affection as it is? I love

you, Christal, more than anyone in the world. What can I say better ?"

"But you do not love me in the way I want you to love me, *m'amie.*"

The crimson blood flooded Leona's face and brow, and made the light in her eyes glow; but she would not acknowledge she was in the wrong.

"Then you must learn to be satisfied with *my* way, Tobal. Confess, now. Were I in your power, would you be content to let me remain as I am, dressed up to personate an old woman, and perform all sorts of menial offices for Miss Lucilla Evans ?"

"*Caramba ! No.*"

"I have caught you, then, you see, my brother. It is well I am more on my guard than you are. Were I to yield to your wishes, you would upset all my plans, and spoil the hopes of a lifetime. No, Christal, I have chalked out my path, and I shall walk in it

without deviating to the right hand or the left. I will *do* nothing, and think of nothing, until I have accomplished the work before me."

"And when it *is* accomplished, *m'amie?*"

"Wait till it is accomplished, Christal."

"Tell me," he said, catching her hand, "will you marry me then?"

Leona paused, and regarded him thoughtfully. "I think not, Tobal. I think that I shall then go back to New York and the profession I love, and be content to keep you as my brother and my very good friend until my life's end."

"You have no heart!" cried Valera, as he flung himself upon the sofa.

"I should have no reason were I to comply with your request, Tobal. Listen to me. There are circumstances—more than I can tell you of now—doubts, surmises, that will prevent my marrying *any one* until they are cleared up—— But I heard a carriage stop at the door.

I must leave you. It may be the family returned. One word, my brother. You remember your promise and mine. If you attempt to betray me we part for ever."

"I will never betray you, Leona." She threw herself beside him, kissed his hands and his face, and flew out of the apartment.

Christobal rose slowly from his position and followed her example. What was he to think of the wonderful revelations Leona had made to him—of the promise that had been forced from himself? He felt half guilty as he dressed for dinner, and remembered that he could never again meet his host with the same open friendly greeting he had hitherto done. He even questioned whether he ought to remain in the house and accept Mr. Evans' hospitality, while he was cognisant of the dark plot hatching against his respectability. Yet, on the other hand, he had great faith in Leona's perspicuity and judgment, and believed

he could trust her not to move in the matter until she was on the right scent. It was all terribly perplexing and confusing though, and Don Valera's absence of mind was noticed by all the party assembled that evening. It was not until an animated discussion commenced concerning the Marquise de Toutlemonde (whom her friends had at last discovered not to be entirely *sans reproche*), and in which the name of the person who occupied his thoughts was introduced, that Valera could bring himself to take any interest in the matter in hand. The Misses Lillietrip—according to their usual custom—had appeared about dinner-time, and been asked to take their places at the table; and they were full of the terrible discovery they had made concerning Madame de Toutlemonde, and which had been patent to all the world except the good simple creatures who gaped, open-mouthed, at the recital.

"My dear Mrs. Evans, I assure you if we had known what we now know, she never should have entered our house. So shocked as we were when dear Lady Polecat told us—I thought poor Charlotte would have fainted. But it has taught us a lesson. One cannot be too particular in London."

"My dear Miss Lillietrip, you quite surprise me! Whatever is the matter with Madame la Marquise? Such an elegant creature too! Her dresses were quite a picture! I cannot believe anything was wrong. Do speak plainer."

"Well, my dear! I can hardly do so at the dinner-table, you know—and before the gentlemen. But still, I have no doubt you can understand. Lord Toffey is a *very intimate* friend of hers, they say, and both her carriages belong to the Baron de Raby."

"Dear me! I think it is very kind of

him to have lent them to her," remarked simple-minded Mrs. Evans.

"I wish, if he's got a third to spare, he'd lend it to me," cried Lizzie Vereker, boldly; at which Miss Charlotte opened her eyes, and Captain Rivers frowned.

"You can't think of what you are saying," said Miss Lillietrip. "Charlotte and I have been quite hysterical ever since we heard the news. It is so dreadful to think we should have been seen about with such a woman. What will people say? They may take us for the same sort of characters."

"Oh no they won't, depend upon it!" interposed Captain Rivers, quietly. "I wouldn't be afraid, Miss Lillietrip, if I were you. I wouldn't indeed. I am quite sure no sensible person would ever take you and your sister for anything but what you are."

"I'm sure it's very good of you to say so,"

whispered Miss Lillietrip, much complimented by the captain's faith in her morality.

"Old ewes dressed lamb fashion," whispered Lizzie Vereker into Captain Rivers' ear.

"Hold your tongue! You're very naughty. I'm angry with you," he said, in a way that proved they had much advanced in intimacy since we met them last.

"I don't care," pouted Lizzie.

"I'll make you care next time we are alone," he answered confidently.

And Miss Vereker only laughed and looked pleased at the prospect.

"But respecting poor Madame de Toutlemonde," recommenced Mrs. Evans; "I really don't understand what there is wrong about her."

"I think you had better leave the discussion for another occasion," said her husband

"I'll tell you everything when we are upstairs," said Miss Lillietrip, consolingly.

"But are you sure you're correct? For it seems so hard if there should be a mistake——"

"Begging your pardon for interrupting you, Mrs. Evans," said Captain Rivers, "Miss Lillietrip is not mistaken. The lady she alludes to should never have entered your house. I was astonished when I saw her here. But it was not my part to interfere."

"Well, I am surprised to hear you say so. It was Miss Forrester who introduced her to us, and I thought she was always so particular."

"Miss Forrester is a regular time-server," cried Lizzie Vereker, "and particular about nothing so long as her acquaintances give good dinners, and have carriages of which she can make use. Papa always calls her the 'toad-eater.' See how she turned round upon that nice young fellow Valera!"

It was at this juncture that Christobal began to take an interest in the proceedings.

"Hush!" said Captain Rivers to Lizzie, although Lucilla Evans was not of the dinner-party.

"I shall not hush, Willy; and you'll be good enough not to order me about, as if I were a baby. He *was* a nice young fellow, wasn't he, Mr. Evans? I thought him most jolly; and his turning out not to be Don Valera, and cutting off just at the very time he was most wanted, has nothing whatever to do with his personal characteristics, has it? I liked him immensely."

"You needn't tell us that. You showed your preference openly enough," remarked Rivers.

"Oh! not half what I did when we were alone. You should have seen us together in the close carriage, Willie."

"My dear Lizzie, I am sure you don't mean what you say," interposed Mrs. Evans.

"Don't I?" said the girl, audaciously.

"You never saw your double, Don Valera, did you?"

"It has yet to be discussed who he is," replied Christobal, evasively.

"He was *so* handsome, Don, and so fascinating. And didn't Madame de Toutlemonde think so—that's all!"

Valera was so much amused at this idea, and evinced his enjoyment of it so freely, that Mrs. Evans became fearful to what extent Lizzie's excitement might not lead her, and proposed an adjournment to the drawing-room.

"I am exceedingly annoyed with you," whispered Captain Rivers to Lizzie as she passed him.

"And I hate you," she rejoined in the same tone.

They were engaged to be married by this time, and were, to all appearance, the most quarrelsome couple that had ever proposed to link themselves together for life. They fought

and made it up again twenty times a-day in public. But they never fought when they were alone. And for all their contradictions they loved each other the more heartily, perhaps, that there was no false sentimentality mingled with their undoubted affection.

* * * * *

When Lucilla Evans returned from her drive, languid, dispirited, and fatigued, she found her new attendant in the most orderly of dresses, ready to relieve her of her walking attire, and to wait upon her during the meal, which she now almost invariably took in her own room.

"Mamma told me to tell you, Miss Gibson," she said, as she sent away the third or fourth dish untouched, "that you are to consult your own convenience about taking the air, and that if you have been used to walk at any particular hour, she begs you will continue to do so."

"Your mamma is very good, Miss Lucy; but I should not think of leaving the house so long as I can be of any use to you. What do you propose to do this evening?"

"I'm sure I don't know. Lie here, I suppose, and wish that I was dead!"

"You don't mean that, miss. I was in hopes you would let me put you on one of your pretty white muslin dresses, and go downstairs to the drawing-room."

"I'd rather stay where I am. They've got a lot of people down there to-night, and Lizzie Vereker and Captain Rivers, and they're always chaffing me, and I hate being chaffed."

"Perhaps you would like Miss Vereker to visit you here instead?"

"No! I'd rather be alone, thank you," but as she said the words, Leona saw a tear steal out of the corner of Lucilla's eye and roll slowly down her cheek. She perceived that the girl was just in that condition when

her heart would be most open to the consolation of a sympathetic friend, and determined at once who that friend should be. She did not again mention the subject that appeared so distasteful to Lucilla, but commenced to speak to her on general matters instead; telling her one or two tales of American life, which she affirmed she had heard from a brother-in-law, and which diverted her companion's thoughts to that degree that she had eaten half her dinner before she remembered that she was not hungry. And then Leona opened both doors and windows, and let the evening breeze circulate freely through the rooms, telling her patient (still, of course, second-hand, through the fictitious brother-in-law) that that was the secret of keeping one's health in tropical climates.

"I think we are too much afraid of draughts in England, Miss Lucilla. We live so shut up during the winter, that we cannot

persuade ourselves but that a current of air must be dangerous all the year round. Yet in hot climates, where the doors and windows are thrown open on every side, colds are unknown. It is too little air that gives us cold, not too much."

"It is very refreshing after such a warm day," said Lucilla.

"And you would feel much cooler if you did not lie down, miss. Come, now! try sitting in this arm-chair close by the window, and let me take down your hair, and run the brush through it."

Lucilla had never been so well cared for yet, for Mrs. Evans, with all her solicitude, was too fussy to make a good nurse. But Miss Gibson's hands were so firm and tender, and her voice was so richly modulated, and her conversation so cheerful and animated, that the poor sickly girl could not help feeling the influence of her genial companion.

But Leona had another remedy in store for her—to prove more potent she hoped than any of the others. When she guessed that the time had come for the ladies to quit the drawing-room, she proposed to fetch Lucilla a cup of coffee. As she tapped at the drawing-room door and made her request, Mrs. Evans naturally came up to her.

"How is Lucy, Miss Gibson? Is she coming down to-night?"

"May I speak to you for a moment alone, madam?"

"Oh, certainly," replied Mrs. Evans, as she drew Leona aside.

"Miss Lucilla is very well, madam, but she is slightly depressed. She does not feel inclined to join the party in the drawing-room, nor to have any of the ladies upstairs. Yet I think a little company would do her good."

"I think so too, Miss Gibson, but if she won't see anyone, what are we to do?"

"If I might make so bold as to suggest it, madam, perhaps a visit from the doctor might cheer her up a little. I think she might be the better for a soothing draught when she goes to bed too; and if he sat with the young lady for an hour or so he would be able to decide what is best to give her, without mentioning the subject of medicine, to which she seems very averse."

"The doctor! What, Dr. Hastings? There is no objection whatever to his seeing Miss Lucy if she will see him. He has known her from a little child. I will tell him when he comes up from the dining-room."

"If you will allow me, madam, I will save you the trouble as he passes through the hall."

"Oh, by all means, Miss Gibson, if you will be so good, and then you can let him know just what you think she wants. The ladies had better not go upstairs then?"

"I should say not, madam. Miss Lucilla

is quiet now, and reading a book, but she has been very hysterical since coming in from her drive."

"Well, I leave her with perfect confidence in your hands, Miss Gibson, for she appears to have taken a great fancy to you. Only, should she want me at any time, just let me know."

And then Mrs. Evans returned to her discussion with Miss Lillietrip on Madame de Toutlemonde's poor battered character, and Leona found her way downstairs.

"Dr. Hastings is just the sort of bluff, manly fellow," she thought to herself, "to knock all the nonsense out of poor Lucy's head, that I so unwittingly put into it. She cannot really have liked me. It must have been a delusion. And Dr. Hastings really likes her. So that if by any means in my power I can further this matter, so as to efface the remembrance of the other, I shall not feel quite so guilty about it as I do now."

As the gentlemen issued in a file from the dining-room they found this highly respectable middle-aged female, in cap and spectacles, waiting for them in the hall. Valera started and coloured as he caught sight of her, and then rushed rapidly upstairs. Mr. Evans stopped and wished her good evening, asking if there was anything he could do for her.

"No, thank you, sir, it is the doctor I want to speak to."

"Nothing wrong with Miss Lucy, I hope."

"Nothing of the least consequence, sir," and then Mr. Evans and the other men felt they were in the way, and left her alone with Dr. Hastings.

"Now, what is it, nurse?" he inquired, as they stood together under the gaslight.

"I have been placed in charge of Miss Evans, sir, and feel responsible for her well-doing. Little as I've seen of her, I can plainly

perceive her illness is more of the mind than the body."

"You are quite right there, nurse."

"She is perfectly able, sir, to walk about and come downstairs like the others, but she's moping herself to death instead. She fancies she can't eat, or talk, or exert herself in any way, but it's all fancy. I wished her to have company up in her room this evening, but she refused. But I think it would do her good to see *you*, sir."

"*Will* she see me?" he asked, with a kindling eye.

"I'm sure she will, sir; or at least that I can manage it, if you will give up an hour to her."

"Oh, I'll give as many as you like."

"If you will sit and talk with her whilst I go out for a little while, she'll be forced, as it were, to exert herself, till I come in again And force is necessary in some cases, sir. And

Mrs. Evans sends her compliments to you, and she'll be much obliged if you will do as I say."

"I shall be delighted to oblige Mrs. Evans in anything."

"I told her, sir, that Miss Lucy required a little medicine, just for an excuse, but she wants nothing in reality but a little diversion. She is very sad just now, and her heart will open to any kindness. And I'm sure a little of your lively talk will do her all the good in the world."

"You're a very sensible woman, nurse, and see things in a wonderfully clear light. If we had more nurses like you there wouldn't be so much sickness in the world."

"And if we had more doctors like you, sir, there wouldn't be so many young lady patients," said Leona, significantly.

Tom Hastings stopped short, and stared at her.

"Bless my soul! Miss Gibson—you don't mean to say——"

"I mean to say, sir, that Miss Lucy doesn't know what she's fretting for, and that it's your business to go and find out."

"And I *will* find out, by Jove!" said Dr. Hastings, as he followed her upstairs.

She took him straight into the room without any ceremony.

"Here, Miss Lucilla, is the doctor come to see you," she said briskly; "and as I'm going out for half an hour to get a little air, he says he will kindly sit with you till I return."

"I can sit by myself, perfectly well," said Lucy, quickly.

"Oh! you'll let me stay, won't you?" asked Tom, as he took her hand; "I will be very quiet, Lucy, and not say a word if you do not wish it, or I will fan you, or read to you. It is better you should not be left alone while your nurse is away."

"Of course it is. She *mustn't* be left alone. It would prevent my ever going out if she were," interposed Leona.

And stealing past the closed door some moments afterwards, she bent her ear to the keyhole, and heard the low-toned conversation that was going on inside, broken occasionally by a soft laugh from Lucilla, with a smile at the success of her stratagem.

Only as she passed the drawing-room door on her way downstairs the smile faded from her features, and gave place to a wild look of longing that was much more like pain.

CHAPTER VIII.

MADAME ANTOINE.

NATURALLY the first means by which Leona tried to find out the address of Rebecca Levitt was through the Post Office Directory. Here she was confronted by the names of nine "Antoines;" naturalised Frenchmen, pursuing their avocations in London. Of these, four were jewellers, two pawnbrokers, one a bird-stuffer, one a perfumer, and one a dentist. She noted the addresses of all of them, but in case the vague account she received from Mrs. Levitt, of Liverpool, should have any truth in it, she determined to try the jewellers first. And since the Evans were talking freely of the chances of leaving town for change of

air, she felt she had no time to lose. But after a few days spent in her new situation, Leona experienced no difficulty in getting out to pursue her inquiries. The ladies were only too kind in pressing her to lighten her duties as much as possible. Indeed, so attentive was Mrs. Evans to her slightest wish, that she felt surer each day that, instigated by her husband's commands, her mistress's great object was to keep her content to remain where she was. But with all four of the jewellers Leona failed in her object to discover Rebecca Levitt. To each one she demanded an introduction, in the name and character of Miss Gibson, urging as an excuse that she was the bearer of messages from Madame Antoine's relations, and having unfortunately mislaid the address given her, was compelled to make inquiries on her own behalf. But at each house she received a polite answer in the negative. Two of the jewellers had never been married,

none of them had even heard of the name of Rebecca Levitt. Leona began to fear her Liverpool informants had led her altogether astray, or that Madame Antoine had settled in Paris instead of London. Yet if she were above ground she resolved to find her, were she hidden in Paris or Vienna, or any other continental city. She would not call her life her own until she had dragged all that was to be dragged of this secret to the light.

She was returning home one evening after a fruitless interview with the fourth and last jeweller, weary and dispirited. She intended to try the pawnbrokers, birdstuffer, perfumer, and dentist, but she had little hope of them. And as she neared the house, walking slowly and with a downcast air, Christobal, smoking near the open dining-room window, caught sight of her, and before she could ring the servants' bell, he had opened the hall door.

Her first glance at his face brought a flash of pleasure, the next a look of fear. She had grown afraid, from several little encounters they had had on the staircase lately, lest, in his desire to enjoy her newly-recovered company, he might become careless of the embargo she had laid upon him.

"You should not have done it," she said, in a low tone of warning, as she walked past him into the hall.

"*M'amie*, you will not leave me like this; you will give me a few minutes to myself this evening? Fancy what I must suffer, shut up day after day in the same house with you, and yet unable to exchange a word!"

"It is not safe we should do so," she replied.

"Come into the dining-room for one moment now. It is empty."

"I cannot. I might be discovered there."

"And what then?"

"It would raise suspicion, to say the least of it."

"And you think that I can go on like this, without a word—a kiss?"

"It is absolutely necessary."

"Leona, you are heartless, unfeeling—you care for no one but yourself."

"Perhaps so, Tobal."

"Do not call me by that name! It is a mockery—a falsehood! It means that you love me, whereas you do not care one straw whether I suffer or rejoice."

Her lip trembled, but she answered quietly, "You must think what you please, *mon frère.* I have already given you my reasons for behaving as I do. If, after that, you choose to misunderstand me, I cannot help it."

"You *can* help it, and I will make you," he answered fiercely.

"I think not. You are a Spaniard, and will never break your word; and there is no

other way by which you can circumvent my plans?"

"Is there not? We will see."

"I am not afraid," said Leona, with apparent indifference, as she left him and went upstairs. But she was not indifferent—far from it. Alone she shed some bitter, burning tears over Christobal's unkindness; but she knew his impetuous nature, which a tender word, or a look, or a kiss from her would set burning like lighted flax, and she dared not indulge herself or him until the time for hardness and endurance was past, and the task she had set herself completed.

It was more difficult to obtain interviews with the pawnbrokers than it had been with the jewellers. The latter were men of substance and position, who were not afraid of what a visitor might require of them; but the hands of the former were not entirely free from dirty work, and they were not sure what

business even strangers, who came in the garb of respectable men or women, might not have with them. From the first shop Leona was dismissed with a curt and surly negative, which betrayed as much suspicion as it excited; and to the presence of the second M. Antoine, pawnbroker, she could not even gain admittance. He appeared to be the owner of a large establishment—half of which was devoted to the sale of second-hand plate, watches, and jewellery, and half to the mysterious business which is conducted beneath the shadow of three gold balls; but to all her inquiries for the master, she received rough answers to the effect that M. Antoine did not live there, and they had no instructions to give his address to any one. Yet some instinct made Leona linger about this shop more than she had done about the others. She reiterated her request in the jeweller's department several days consecutively, but without success. She

attempted to enter the pawnbroker's part of the establishment, but found the counter so crowded by customers that no one else had any attention paid to them. Then she thought of bringing some article of her own to pawn; and selecting a solid gold chain, which had been handed down to her amongst her mother's things, she presented herself once more at M. Antoine's establishment, and patiently waited her turn to be served. There were two men standing behind the counter. One was a fair-haired young Englishman, the other an undoubted French Jew; and with her first glance at him Leona felt convinced that (notwithstanding the assertions of the shopmen that he did not live on the premises) she saw the master of the establishment.

He it was who priced every article that was placed upon the counter; he it was who endorsed the pawn-tickets, and grudgingly paid the money lent; and he it was, in con-

sequence, to whom Leona determined to address herself.

"What can I do for you, miss?" demanded the apprentice, presently, but she put him to one side.

"I wish to speak to the master," she said firmly, and something in her dress and manner made him yield to her.

He whispered to the old Jew, who immediately turned his keen eyes and gold spectacles upon her face.

"What is your business?" he demanded, abruptly.

"I wish you to value this chain for me, M. Antoine."

The man did not disown the title she gave him, but turned the massive gold links over and over in his hand.

"Three pounds ten," he said presently.

"It is worth five times that money," she answered.

"Well, let us say five pounds then. Will you take it in gold or notes? What name and address?"

"My name is Miss Gibson. I am a friend of your wife, M. Antoine, Rebecca Levitt, that was. You might take that fact into consideration, I think." As she mentioned and rather accentuated the words "Rebecca Levitt," M. Antoine looked up at her, sharply and fiercely—then dropped his eyes again upon the chain he was holding.

"I say I know Madame Antoine," repeated Leona.

"You are mistaken. There is no Madame Antoine," replied the Jew, with closed lips.

As he said the words the fair-haired apprentice flashed one look of surprise from his side the counter. It did not occupy an instant, but it was enough for Leona. She was about to reply, when the heavy swinging

doors were pushed slowly open, and the face of a girl, stained, pinched, and dirty in appearance, yet unmistakably of Jewish origin, was thrust timidly into sight.

"Mother's so bad to-night," she said. "She does nothing but cry, and we've had no dinner since the day before yesterday."

"Go to the d—l with you!" screamed the old Jew, in a voice of rage, as he stamped his foot behind the counter. The starved face disappeared as quickly as it had come, but the child still lingered about the outside of the door.

"Charles," said M. Antoine, "go and send that girl away at once. I won't have a lot of beggars hanging about the place."

As Charles crossed the shop to do his master's bidding, and caught Leona's eye, was it fancy, or did he actually wink at her? Whether or not, the expression of his face set all her blood boiling, and made her as

anxious to get out of the shop as she had been to get into it.

"Shall we say five pounds for the chain, mees?" continued the pawnbroker.

"Yes, if you cannot let me have more on it. But I wish you would give me Madame Antoine's address."

The old Jew's rage at this second allusion to his supposed wife was comically undisguised.

"I tell you, mees, there is no Madame Antoine. God dam. Am I not to be belief in my own house? There is plenty more of my name. Why should I have a wife because you think I have? Is it not enough that I say no? I cannot bear these questions that have nothing to do with my business. You must take your money, or you must take your chain and go. There is no Madame Antoine in this place that you can see. God dam. It is most provoking to be questioned in this way."

"I will take the money, I think, monsieur" (she foresaw she might need another excuse for worrying the testy little pawnbroker), "and I hope I haven't annoyed you. But you must remember I want news of a friend."

"Well, then, I know nothing of your friend, mees. And here is the money and the ticket; and I wish you a very good day. Charles, see to the business whilst I make a note of this transaction."

And apparently anxious to elude further inquiry, the Jew bolted into an inner apartment, upon which Leona gathered up her money and prepared to depart. The shop was again crowded with applicants for relief, but the fair-haired apprentice managed to waylay her on her road to the door.

"The child will give you the address," he whispered, as she passed him.

The child! yes! she had thought of that, but hardly imagined there could be any con-

nection between her and the well-to-do pawnbroker. Now, fearful of losing sight of her, she darted out of the shop like lightning. But there was the poor little attenuated form and starved face still leaning hopelessly against the window-frame.

"What are you waiting here for?" said Leona, kindly.

She was a girl of about thirteen or fourteen years of age. Her face was grained with dirt, and her rough hair was twisted up in an untidy knot at the back of her head; still, as she lifted her black lustrous eyes to meet Leona's glance, it was evident she would have been handsome had she been well cared for.

"I'm waiting to see if father will give me any money for mother. We've had nothing but bread to eat for the last two days, and mother's so ill she can't stir. And he *must* give it, *he must,*" she added passionately,

while the tears overflowed her eyes and mingled with the dirt upon her cheek.

"But what if he won't?"

"I'll sit here till the policeman comes and orders me on, and then I'll make a row and everybody will hear it, and he'll be obliged to give me something to keep me quiet. The wretch! I hate him!" said the girl vehemently, with a clenched hand in the direction of the door.

"Then M. Antoine is your father?"

"Yes, he is. I wish he wasn't."

"And your mother is Madame Antoine?"

"Of course she is. But father and she haven't lived in the same house for years. She's so bad," continued the child pathetically. "She's been in bed for weeks."

"May I go and see her with you?"

"What good will that do?"

"I may be able to help her a little. I knew a person of her name many years ago.

I think she must be the same. Perhaps she might like to see an old friend if she is in distress."

"Can you get her something to eat?" said the girl, thinking of the main chance.

"That I will, and you too. Let us go and buy it now, and take it home together."

"But you won't like to walk with me."

"Give me your hand, and you shall see."

She took the child's dirty hand in hers as she spoke, and led her on, till they should reach the shops they needed.

"What is your name? What am I to call you?" said Leona, presently.

"Rebecca. It's mother's name as well as mine."

Leona's heart gave a great bound. She had succeeded in her search at last. Her excitement became so great that she laid in a stock of meat, bread, and groceries, that made the eyes of her strange companion sparkle

with astonishment; and then, calling a cab, she told Rebecca to direct the driver where to take them.

The girl gave some address that, in her ignorance of London thoroughfares, conveyed no idea of locality to Leona's brain, and they rattled away together through the hot dusty streets until the cab stopped at the entrance of a dirty purlieu in the back slums of Tottenham Court Road.

"I don't think we can get up here, miss," said the driver as he came round to the door.

"Oh no!" cried the little girl, "but I'll carry the things;" and loading herself with parcels, she tumbled out of the cab, which Leona dismissed, and led the way up a filthy court to the door of a still more filthy-looking house.

"We used to live in a better place than this," she said, apologetically, to her visitor; "but since mother's been so bad she can't

work, and there's nothing to pay the rent except what Tommy and I get."

So anxious was Leona to ascertain if she had really hit on the right person at last, that she did not even ask how "Tommy" and her informant earned the money for the rent, but, stumbling after the girl into the dark close passage, asked if she had not better inform her mother first that a lady wished to speak to her.

"All right," said Rebecca; "and you stay here till I come back, miss."

Leona placed her back up against the dirty wall, in order to let the stream of lodgers that seemed constantly passing backwards and forwards go by, and waited the child's return with as much patience as she could. Presently Rebecca came back with the uncouth message:

"Mother's very much obliged for the things, but she says, *who are you?*"

"Tell your mother my name is Gibson,

and she knew my aunt many years ago at Willowside."

But the effect of this communication was not so satisfactory as it was intended to be. In a few minutes Rebecca returned to say that mother was very sorry, but she was too ill to see anybody that day. Leona felt that she had made a mistake somewhere, and determined to retrieve it. She could not turn her feet away now that she had gained the very threshold, without a sight of Rebecca Levitt.

"Go back," she said to the girl, "and tell your mother that I am very sorry she is ill, but I have something to say that she ought to hear. I have news for her of *George Evans.*"

Leona heard the child's shrill voice delivering this second message a couple of storeys above where she stood, and the cry of surprise that followed it. And then

Rebecca's unshod feet came flying down the rickety stairs again with double speed, and she called out breathlessly to her new acquaintance:

"Please come upstairs, miss, as quick as ever you can, for mother's took very bad, and she wants to see you directly—this very minute."

And, making her way up the dark steps as best she could, Leona followed her little companion to the bedroom of her mother.

CHAPTER IX.

THE MYSTERY OF LUCILLA.

A GROUP of children was hanging about the doorway to stare at the unusual apparition of a visitor to their mother's dirty room, but Leona, only eager to ascertain if she had really found the person of whom she was in search at last, pushed past them without comment, and followed Rebecca into the apartment. It was meagrely furnished, and the want of fresh air and cleanliness made itself painfully apparent to more nerves than one, but Leona had no eyes except for the bed that stood at the farther end, and the wretchedly-attenuated figure that lay upon it. From the ideal she had built up on the

descriptions afforded by Wallis and Mrs. Levitt of Liverpool, and making allowance for the time that had elapsed since they had seen her, Leona had come to picture Madame Antoine as a full-blown, highly-coloured, and coarsely-constituted woman of middle age. And so, under happier circumstances, the poor creature might have become. But sorrow and sickness are great refiners if they are not beautifiers, and they had combined to temper down Rebecca Levitt's country homeliness until she was but a shadow of her former self. Leona could not at first believe that the emaciated woman who leaned upon her elbow staring anxiously into her face, and breathing laboriously with expectation the while, could be the person she desired to see.

"Are you Rebecca Levitt?" she demanded, in a voice of astonishment, too much taken aback to observe her usual caution.

"I *was!*" replied the woman, slowly.

"And what business can you have with me, that concerns the dead and gone?"

"You speak of George Evans? How do you know that he is dead and gone?"

A change seemed to come over the invalid's countenance. Her eyes looked wild and troubled.

"They told me so," she answered vaguely, "or else—or else—*how should I be here?*"

At this juncture she glanced at the cluster of children, six or seven in number, hanging, open-mouthed, about the bed, and shuddered.

Leona, with a woman's rapid intuition, guessed her feeling, and, misinterpreting the reason of it, shuddered with her. She thought it indicated that the rumours she had heard in Liverpool were true, and that her father had indeed been married to Rebecca Levitt. She felt she must ascertain the truth if she died for it. And the most powerful means of arriving at it, she knew, would be

by the pretence that he still lived, to urge whatever claims he might have upon her.

"He died years and years ago," continued the woman, half inquiringly. "He *must* be dead—they all said so!"

"I fancy I know more about him than you do," said Leona, quietly; "and I have been searching for you for some time to tell you so. Can you send the children away?"

"Go away, all of you, and do not come again until you are told!" exclaimed the mother, sharply; and then, as the door closed upon the dirty, dishevelled, and much disappointed little group, she turned to her visitor, and clutched her hand with feverish anxiety.

"Tell me all! tell me everything!" she exclaimed. "Is George Evans still alive?"

"Had you not better feed the children first, and have something to eat yourself?" said Leona, glancing at the packages she had

purchased on the way. "You are weak and ill, and not fit to go through an exciting conversation without taking some nourishment."

"No, no! tell me of him first. I cannot eat or rest till I have heard what you have come to say. *Children!* what are the children compared to him—to *him?* I had a child once; but no matter, no matter! Go on; tell me, is he in England?"

"How could he be in England whilst he is under a charge of murder, Madame Antoine? What did he leave England for except to escape it?"

"But you don't believe he murdered Anson?" demanded Madame Antoine, anxiously.

"*I do not!*"

"No, no; no more do I. But if I had known he was alive; if I were only strong and well, that I might rise and go to him, and tell him all. But I am good for nothing!"

she added, with a deep sigh, as she fell back in her bed.

"Madame Antoine——"

"Ah! don't call me by that hateful name."

"I must call you so; you have no other now! You do more than disbelieve that George Evans committed that foul murder; you *know* he did not!"

"Who are you that can read my thoughts?" cried the woman, starting up again with knitted brows. "You told the child your name was Gibson, and you came from Willowside, but I never saw you there."

"Perhaps not! You were only there once yourself, remember, when you took little Lucilla down to Sussex, and placed her under the care of my aunt."

At the mention of Lucilla's name, to Leona's surprise Madame Antoine began to sob. It was painful to see her rocking herself

backwards and forwards whilst the tears oozed through her thin fingers.

"Oh, don't speak of it; don't speak of it!" she cried.

"I know it is an unhappy subject, but it is to speak of it I am here this morning. I have been trying to trace you for a long time, Rebecca Levitt, and now that I have found you, you must hear me speak."

"But why? What interest have you in the matter?"

"Every interest possible. I am employed in the Evans family. I know George Evans' daughter."

"What, my darling?" exclaimed Madame Antoine, in a shrill voice, as she grasped Leona's arm, "have you seen my child?—my lover's child? Oh, tell me how she is—how she looks!"

"I think you have mistaken my words," replied Leona, now scarcely less agitated than

her companion. "I did not know you had ever had a child—besides the ones I saw here this moment."

"Why should I be ashamed to tell of it, now when I am dying so rapidly that I do not know from day to day whether the next will not prove my last? Yes, I *had* a child, of which George Evans was the father, and I was proud of it—proud of it and of him—proud to know that I belonged to them both. Now think of me what you will." And as she concluded Madame Antoine cast herself down upon the bed, and buried her face in her hands.

Leona placed her hand upon the prostrate woman's head. Why should she not? She was pure and upright, and honourable herself, and the creature she pitied might have that to disclose to her that would ruin her life's happiness; but she was a woman, sick and suffering; and her father, whose memory, whatever wrong he might have done her, Leona could

never cease to love and cherish, had honoured her with his preference—perhaps with his name—therefore was she sacred in the eyes of his faithful daughter.

"Do not touch me," murmured Madame Antoine, as she writhed beneath the pressure of her visitor's hand.

"Why should I not? Believe me that I wish to be your friend—that I came here for no other purpose."

"I am not worthy!"

"No one is worthy of any good that heaven sends him if we look at it in that light. But come now, Madame Antoine, let me tell you the reason for which I have found you out. Your suspicions with regard to George Evans are correct. *He is dead!*"

The woman made no exclamation of surprise or suffering at the news. She only writhed again, with her face still hidden, and uttered a low moan.

"But he has left a child behind him—not yours, but another," said Leona, observing the start occasioned by the reference. "And it is on behalf of that child, who is in sore need of your assistance, that I traced you to your home."

"What child?—what child?" muttered Madame Antoine. "He had no child but mine."

"Not when you knew him, perhaps, but afterwards. He left this country, as you know, under a false and cruel charge of murder, and settled in a foreign land, where after a while he married. It is this daughter who has now come to England to claim justice for her father's name, and asks you to help her in clearing it. Will you not listen to her for the sake of the love you bore him?"

But the effect of this announcement was very different from what Leona had anticipated. Dying and deserted as she was, all

the woman was yet strong within Madame Antoine's breast, and her first burst of grief was not for the certainty of her lover's death, but the news that he had forgotten her for another.

"*Married!*" she exclaimed in so strong a voice that Leona could scarcely believe it was the same as that in which she had spoken hitherto. "George married! Oh my God! why did I ever let him leave me? Why did I ever let them make me believe that he was guilty? I was strong and young then—I was free to go where I chose—and I loved him as never woman loved a man before! My handsome, noble, good-hearted George! The father of my child! Why didn't I leave everything and follow him? I wanted to do so. I was nearly mad because they wouldn't let me; but they held me back, and threatened me, and told me he was a murderer, and I believed them until it was too late—too late. And it

has ended in this; and he forgot me, forgot me, and married another woman! Oh! every minute will be an age now until death comes to release me from this pain!"

"I don't think he forgot you, madame," said Leona, gently. "George Evans never forgot anyone who loved him, but he was in a strange land, alone and unhappy, and he was bound by no legal ties to you."

"We were bound by our love and our child to one another."

At this admission Leona's heart gave a great bound of thankfulness, but she continued calmly: "We must not judge of men's feelings by our own, madame. George Evans doubtless loved you very dearly, but he believed that you, in common with the rest of the world, had condemned him as a criminal, and that he should never see you more. And he needed the solace of affection and sympathy, and when it came to him in the shape of a

woman's love, it is hardly to be expected he should have resisted it."

"And then he died," murmured Madame Antoine.

"And then he died—very unhappily, very miserably—and his last injunction to his daughter was that she should strive by every means in her power to clear his name from a wicked calumny that had embittered all his life. And it was with that view she came to England, and it is with that view she asks for your assistance now, to help her by telling all that lies in your power concerning that unhappy business."

In her anxiety to make an impression on her companion's mind, Leona had somewhat dropped the artificial tone she naturally adopted, and it rang out so full, clear, and youthful as to rouse all Madame Antoine's suspicions as to her identity.

"You have deceived me!" she said

quickly. "Your name is not Gibson, who are you?"

"*I am George Evans' daughter!*" cried Leona, with a sudden impulse, as she pulled off her glasses, bonnet, and wig, and threw herself on her knees beside the bed, "and I have come here to-day to say to you: 'Rebecca Antoine, you loved my dead father better than you did yourself! Help me to clear his name from this foul charge that he may look down and bless us both from heaven!'"

The woman gazed at her for a few moments almost in alarm, then seizing her face between her two hands, she gazed at her features as though she could never look at them sufficiently.

"*His* eyes," she exclaimed, with an hysterical gasp, "*his* mouth, *his* brow! Oh my George, my George, my George! How much I loved him! And he is dead, and you are his child; *his* child, as much as mine is. Oh,

kiss me, kiss me for his sake! and if I die for it you shall know *all!*"

She opened her arms as she spoke; and as Leona felt herself folded within them, she believed her battle was won.

"Can you help me?" she cried.

"I will tell you *everything.* What does it signify now? *He* is dead; my oath is no longer binding. And I would never have taken it, had I not thought my George was gone for ever. Oh, you are so like him! What is your name?"

"Leona; it is a foreign name. My mother was a Brazilian."

"Don't talk to me of your mother. Tell me of your father—of yourself. When did he die, and where?—my brave, handsome George! And did he speak of me and of the child—the dear child they took from me?"

"I will tell you everything you wish to know if you will eat something first," said

Leona, glad to be able to waive an awkward question; for never, so far as she knew, had a thought of poor Rebecca Levitt crossed her father's mind. "You are exhausted with this exciting conversation, and will be unable to continue it without sustenance. These poor children, too. They looked so hungry. Let me feed them and yourself first, and then I will tell you all I know of my poor father's life and death."

"You will not leave me?" said Madame Antoine, anxiously.

"I will not, indeed. I will remain with you until you have no further need of me," replied Leona, who felt she had entered on a mission she must fulfil until the end, whatever that end might be.

"Then do as you think best," said the dying woman, as she fell back exhausted on her pillows. Leona, having first resumed her disguise, went to the door, and called back

the poor starving little children, who were only too eager to respond to her invitation. Her heart was beating rapidly with expectation the while, but the true womanly instinct that was ever uppermost in it prevented her from wanting anything at that particular moment so much as to see those hungry little ones fed. It was good to watch the avidity with which they seized upon the food which her forethought had provided for them, and the delight with which, after having satisfied the first keen pangs of appetite, they carried the remainder away to have a feast upon the stairs; on which Leona left all further care of them to the eldest sister, and directed her attention more particularly to their mother, who appeared to be in the last stage of consumption. On seeing her considerably revived by the administration of some warm arrowroot, which she mixed herself and made warm for her over a neighbour's fire, Leona ventured to

ask Madame Antoine how she came to find the wife and children of a man so well off as the pawnbroker in so pitiable a condition of poverty.

"Your friends at Liverpool, from whom I obtained the first traces of your address, seemed to imagine you were in the most flourishing circumstances."

"Let them continue to think so," gasped Madame Antoine. "It is for that reason that I have held no communication with them for years."

"But has there been any quarrel between your husband and yourself, that he thus neglects you and the children?"

"No open quarrel, but a suspicion which he will never forgive. I slaved for him for fifteen years, and he turned me and the children out of the house, and has barely allowed us sufficient money to keep life in us since."

"And what was this suspicion, madame, if I may ask the question?"

"You shall hear it in due course. Am I to tell you my story first, or will you tell me yours?"

"If you do not mind, let me hear what you have to say first. I have already been several hours away from home, but I do not feel as if I could leave you until you have told me all you know concerning the murder of Abraham Anson."

"I will do all for you in my power, for to-morrow may be too late. Come nearer, that I may not have to raise my voice more than is necessary."

CHAPTER X.

"LEVITT'S CONFESSION."

LEONA drew her chair closer to the bedside, and Madame Antoine laid her hand on hers.

"You are *so* like him—so very, very like him! It seems almost as if the days of my girlhood had come back again, and he was sitting by my side and talking to me. Ah well! perhaps I shall see him before long. Who knows?"

She was silent for a minute, and then went on.

"What I have to tell you involves more names than one! but if it injured all the rest of the world I would disclose it for the sake of

benefiting my George's child. You *are* his child—you are not deceiving me?"

"Why should I deceive you? Do not my features speak for themselves?"

"Oh yes, they do! I might doubt your tongue—I cannot doubt your eyes! My dear, the blame of Anson's murder was thrown on your dear father's shoulders to screen the real culprit."

"And he was——?"

"Wait, and let me tell you in its proper turn. When George and Henry Evans were lads of seventeen and eighteen, I was a rosy-cheeked girl of the same age, and my father, Richard Levitt, was employed in their uncle's firm as clerk, Mr. Anson being the cashier. I need not make this part of my story long, my dear. Your father was handsome, and thoughtless, and fascinating, and I was a motherless girl with a hard father, and took every opportunity of escaping from home to

meet my lover, and the result of it was that shortly after my seventeenth birthday I found I was likely to become a mother. Ah! I shall never forget the terror of that time. I believed that if my father were to find it out he would kill me, and I was half dead with fear and misery. Well, George stood up for me, young as he was, with the courage of a lion. He sent me straight away to some good people in the country, who nursed me through my confinement, and then he went to my father, and told him the whole story from beginning to end, and begged him, for my sake, to keep it quiet for a little while.

"'And what do you mean to do for the girl now you've ruined her?' says my father.

"'I mean to marry her,' says George, boldly. Ah! how often I've heard the story repeated. It seems as if I had listened to every word.

"'How can you marry at your age without your uncle's consent?' says my father.

"'I don't mean directly, but as soon as I'm a man, and able to choose for myself,' replies George. 'Don't be afraid that I shall forget Rebecca, Mr. Levitt, for I love her, and I mean to do the right thing by her.'

"'And what's to become of the child meantime?' roared my father. (Oh, he was a violent, passionate man to deal with!) 'You don't suppose my daughter can come back to Liverpool with a brat at her back, and keep her character, do you?'

"'I have provided for that,' said George. 'I will take the child if you will receive Becky back, and let her live with you until I can marry her.'

"Well, so it was settled. I suppose my father thought the chance of my marrying a gentleman too good to be missed; and so long as the child was not allowed to burthen

him, he cared little about my feelings at parting with it. My poor baby was left at the farmhouse, in charge of the people who had nursed me, and I came back to Liverpool, and no one, except George and my father, were the wiser for the reason I had stayed away. Things went on then much as usual. I wasn't happy, for I fretted after my baby; and my father took to bullying poor George in a way that was very hard to submit to, considering the difference in their stations. So then he became wild, and my father was always bringing me home tales of his extravagance and his riotings, and the bad company he kept, and upbraiding me for my past conduct with him, until I was regularly miserable, and used to tell George that I'd rather go away at once, and work for my child's living and my own, than be subjected to such treatment. I think the dear lad was afraid I might leave him if I hadn't some tie there, and so, unknown to all

but me, he sent for my baby from the country (she was a great girl of eighteen months old by that time), and made arrangements for her being kept in Liverpool, where I might see her now and then, and comfort myself with thinking of the time when we should all live together.

"Now, Mr. Anson was a great friend of George's, and had stood up for him to old Mr. Evans, the uncle, times out of mind. He was a widower, a quiet, kind sort of man, who had rooms over the offices of the firm, and kept the keys of the till, and had everything of value there under his charge; for the partners trusted him as if he had been one of themselves. He had often sent poor George money out of his own purse, and had still oftener persuaded Mr. Evans to advance his nephew some; for the thought of me and my father's wrong had weighed on the poor boy's mind, as I told you before, and had

driven him to be very reckless and extravagant, and he seemed always in debt. Well, one day, I remember it as well as if it were yesterday, George came up to me and said:

"'Who do you think has promised to look after the child for me, Becky? Why, Anson! Isn't it jolly of him? He's told the governor that it belongs to his late wife, and he wants to have it to live with him, and the governor's given him leave to do so. And there it can be, as snug as possible, till you and I can marry and claim it, and he's going to call it Lucy Anson, so that——'"

"*What!*" cried Leona, darting from her chair, and interrupting Madame Antoine's narrative, "is Lucy Anson my father's daughter and yours?"

"Lucilla was her name. I called her Lucilla after my poor mother. To be sure she is. Heaven bless her! But where have you heard of her before?"

"Did I not tell you that I am living with Henry Evans?—that I am acting the part of hired attendant on your daughter, that I am, in fact, nursing, dressing, and waiting on *my own sister!*"

At this piece of intelligence, Madame Antoine became much excited.

"I asked you the question before," she said, "and I thought that you denied it. Oh! tell me how she is—what she is like! I have not seen nor spoken to her for years—for *her* sake, that she might know of no shame connected with me, but I have never forgotten nor ceased to dream of her. She was so fair and white, with golden hair and blue eyes. The sight of these children's eyes makes me shudder when I remember hers—my George's child!"

Leona may have thought in her own mind that the dark piercing orbs that M. Antoine had transmitted to his little family, were more

up. I was half mad, as you may well suppose, my dear, with fear for him and misery for myself, but no one heeded me in the general disturbance. My father was the chief witness on the inquest, and he deposed to there having been high words between Anson and George the night before the murder, and threats having passed between them. But it was one of those cases that seem as if they must remain a mystery for ever; only, as George had run away, all the suspicion was directed against him. As soon as I ascertained the dreadful rumour I had heard was true, my first thought was for my baby; but when I went to fetch her from Mr. Anson's house, regardless of what anyone might say, I found that she had been already removed by old Mr. Evans. I went up to the great house, frantic with anxiety, and told him all my story, which he had already heard from Mr. Henry. The old gentleman was very good. He was more

cut-up than he liked to show at George's disappearance, and he didn't say one word of reproach to me—only he wished to keep the child and bring it up for his nephew's sake. I cried, and said I couldn't part with it; but they talked me over between them, and persuaded me it would be for my little daughter's good; so I let her go to Willowside to Mrs. Gibson's care, and I took her down there myself, and after that I think I went well-nigh crazy with grief. I hoped against hope that my lover would return, or that his name might be cleared from blame, but neither happened. Then—after some five years or so—my brother William, who had run away to sea the same night that poor George left home, turned up again very queer in his mind (he had always been strange from a lad), and my father took to his bed and died; leaving me a sealed letter, with strict injunctions not to open it till ten years had elapsed from the day of his death,

unless George Evans returned to England before that time. Old Mr. Evans was dead too, then, and Mr. Henry had married, and adopted my little Lucy as his own child, and George had never been heard of, as you know. So, being sick of my life in Liverpool, I left it and came to London, where I fell in with Antoine and married him, thinking that a comfortable home might help to make me forget the past. But it didn't. My husband proved to be a miser, and each child was a source of misery to him because it was a source of expense. He was trying to get rid of me and them from the beginning, and he seized the first opportunity to turn us out of doors. When ten years had elapsed from my father's death, I opened the letter he left me. I had not been very curious on the subject before, but I little thought what it contained. Child! *The murderer of Abraham Anson was my own father, Richard Levitt.*"

"*Madre di Dios!*" cried Leona, lapsing into herself in her surprise. "And he could let *my* poor father bear the onus of his own crime for so many years! He was a double murderer, madame. He killed George Evans as well as Abraham Anson."

"Do you think *I* have not felt this as deeply as yourself? Do you think I have not cursed the author of my being for his perfidy and sin? When I read that letter, I raved openly about it. My husband heard (for the first time) of my former conduct, and swore he would never have anything to say to me again. He drove my children and myself from his doors, and has supported us on the barest pittance the law can force him to allow us since. And even now, when he knows that I am dying, he has no pity."

"But the letter? Have you got it still? Did you never make any effort to clear your lover's name by means of it?"

"I would have, had I imagined he was alive, or had left anyone to share his supposed disgrace. But fifteen years had passed since he left England so mysteriously, and not a word had been heard of him, except through my brother Bill, whose intellect had quite given way. So I thought it best, for the sake of all concerned, to say no more about it. The past was past and almost forgotten. To revive it might have afforded satisfaction to the Evans family, but it would have injured my child, and shed irretrievable ignominy on my dead father. So, for their sakes I was silent; and I should have gone down into my grave had you not come, with your father's face and your father's smile, to remind me that I owe him a duty before I go to meet him again."

"You will give me the letter?" said Leona, earnestly.

"You shall take it for yourself. It is at

the bottom of that writing-desk, and here is the key. A piece of parchment tied with a green ribbon. It is properly signed and attested. No question can be raised as to its validity."

Leona seized the paper, which she found as indicated, and tore it open. It was a full confession of the crime, written and witnessed in a regular clerk-like form. After the usual opening formula, it went on to describe the manner in which the murder had been committed:

"I had been very uneasy in my mind for some time past"—so ran the confession—"about my daughter Rebecca. Mr. George Evans had promised me over and over again to marry her, and I believed that he would have done so except for Mr. Anson, who was always preaching patience to me, and dissuading the young man from doing anything in a hurry, for fear of offending his uncle. And

Mr. George was getting very wild too, and was always betting and playing at cards, and losing money in various ways, which didn't look to me like settling down into the married state. On the day of the accident"—it was remarkable that throughout this statement the word "*murder*" was never once used with regard to Anson's death—"I had had an interview with George Evans, and we had parted bad friends. I had reproached him with want of faith to my girl, and to me, and had threatened to go straight up to his uncle and tell him the whole story, as I had threatened Mr. Anson only the day before.

"George swore that want of money was the only thing that prevented his marrying Rebecca, and that he should call on Anson again that evening, and see what could be done about it. I didn't half believe his statement, seeing he had so often trifled with me before, and when the night fell, I took my lad

Bill, who was a strong, lusty fellow, though never over bright in his intellect, and walked up to Anson's rooms.

"I had a good thick stick with me, and so had Bill; for I was getting tired out with excuses and puttings off, and I just meant, if George Evans wouldn't come to terms, to give him a jolly good thrashing, and nothing more.

"When we got up then, we found the gentlemen together, but George had had more than enough liquor, and was in a very excited condition. I stated my case, and explained my terms, but Anson had been talking to George beforehand, and persuading him to leave Liverpool and let me do my worst, and he seemed quite to have veered round and taken up his friend's opinion. They talked big at me, both of them, and dared me to bring forward my daughter's claims, and Anson called her by a name that set all the blood in my body on fire. So I fell upon him. I hardly

know how it happened, but I suppose I must have cracked him on the skull, for he went down like a shot and never spoke again.

"George was too drunk, apparently, to know what had happened, but I did: and when he came dancing towards me and making a noise, I felt his blustering must be stopped for the moment, and I gave him just such another crack and silenced him.

"Then Bill—poor fool!—sat down and blubbered, and I had time to think what was best to do. It was early in the morning, about two or three o'clock (for we had sat up arguing for hours before this happened), and I knew that whatever I did I must do quickly, before the daylight appeared. I turned over Anson's body—it was already beginning to grow stiff.

"'Bill,' I said, 'have you a mind to be hanged?' The poor fool stopped blubbering at this, and looked up, trembling with fright.

"What do you mean?" he asked.

"'Why, I mean just this—that the crack of your stick has killed Anson, and if you don't want the police after you in another hour or so, you must help me carry Evans quietly away.'

"Poor Bill hadn't enough sense to remember if he had hit the clerk or no, so he became all anxiety for his own safety.

"'What am I to do, father?' he said, shaking from head to foot like a leaf.

"'Help me drag Evans out into the passage first. There, that will do. Now you keep by him and wait for me.'

"I crept back again into the office, where we had been quarrelling together. The till was open, and some coin was scattered on the table. Anson had evidently been in a mind to help George when he came in. I gathered up all I could; not that I wanted it, but that there might seem to have been a motive for

the accident; gave Anson's body two or three more cracks to make them believe there had been a struggle, and left it, face downward, on the floor. Then I joined Bill in the passage, and between us we managed to set Evans on his feet and drag him out into the street; though what with the blow and the liquor, he was so stunned that he understood nothing of what was going on. It was some distance from the offices to my house, which was near the docks, but we only met one policeman on the way.

"'Is he ill?' he asked, alluding to George.

"'Ill,' I replied. 'He's so jolly drunk he can't stand.'

"'Where are you taking him to?'

"'Home, to be sure. He's my son.'

"'Very good. Look after him though, or I shall have to do it for you.'

"'If you like to take the trouble off my

hands you're welcome,' I said. I knew he wouldn't.

"'Not I,' he answered laughing; 'there's plenty of work for me without begging for it. Good-night to you.'

"And that was the only chance of detection we ran whilst going home. When we arrived there I took good care Evans shouldn't recover his senses too quickly. I had plenty of beer in the house, and brandy and snuff; and between them all I kept on plying him with hocussed liquor till he was as insensible as a log. Then I made my plans with Bill, and saw that he thoroughly understood them. There was more than one ship lying in the docks, ready to start in the course of a few hours for New York. I got Bill to go aboard one of them with the first dawn of light, taking George with him (still all but insensible), and representing themselves as two brothers (one nearly sick to death) going out

to find work in America. I taught him how to go on plying Evans with liquor till they should get well out to sea, and when he recovered, how to make him believe that in a fit of intoxication he had come to high words and blows with Anson, who had been found dead; and that I, finding that suspicion directed against him, had got him shipped off from Liverpool under a feigned name in order to save his life. The plan succeeded entirely. The young man left Liverpool, and by the time that the accident came to light, there was no trace left of anyone but George Evans having been seen with Mr. Anson. I felt safe, too; for I knew that, even did George Evans venture to return and brave a trial for his supposed offence, it was not in his power to fix the guilt upon Bill or myself, supposing he were sensible enough to remember we had been there. But he never came back, and five years afterwards poor Bill turned up, with

the little sense he had been born with completely knocked out of him. Whether it was the fright of that night, or the terror of discovery, or the weight of the secret, I can't say; but he was brought home by a chance acquaintance, unable to recognise anybody except his sister Rebecca, or to do more than speak his own name; so what happened with regard to himself and George Evans after they left England I never heard. I expect, as likely as not, though, he died in America; and I hope he may have done so, and will never come back to worry my poor daughter, who has had trouble enough on his account, heaven knows. I sent away all the money I took from the till with Bill and George, so that nothing suspicious could be found upon my person; and I had worked for the firm for so many years, and borne so respectable a character, that it would have been strange if they had doubted me. On the contrary, Mr. Henry

Evans took the bastard child my daughter had borne to his brother and adopted it as his own, as some sort of amends, I suppose, for the wrong that had been done to poor Becky. For some years I was very well contented that all should have turned out as it did (for no one could have helped the accident that occurred to poor Anson); but now that I feel I am not the man I was, and the doctors tell me I am breaking up, I think it as well to write out this statement, in case George Evans should come back to England after I'm dead and gone, and get into trouble for want of it. I shall leave it to the care of my daughter Rebecca, with strict injunctions not to read it till ten years after my death; and when she does I hope she'll try to think as little hardly of her father as she can, and remember that what he did he did for her sake, and in the desire to avenge the injury that had been done her."

Here the confession ended.

CHAPTER XI.

THE FULFILMENT OF THE OATH.

LEONA read the confession through from the first word to the last, with trembling, eager haste, and when she had finished it she bowed her head upon her knees and cried bitterly. "Think as little harshly of him as you can," said Madame Antoine, imploringly. "He repented before he died; I am sure of it, or he would never have left this statement to ruin his character after death."

"Of what avail was his repentance," replied Leona, as she lifted her tear-stained face from the shelter of her hands, "since he refused to do justice to the living? Has it

prevented *my* father from dragging out a life of purgatory in exile, and sinking at last into a suicide's grave? Hear *my* story now, Madame Antoine, and judge if it be possible for me to say from my heart that I forgive your father even in another world."

With all the powers of her elocutionary and dramatic art, Leona then proceeded to unfold her history to the ears of Madame Antoine, who listened, and wept, and lamented over the unhappy life and miserable death of her lost lover. But as Leona proceeded to describe her own resolution to avenge her father's wrongs and clear his name from an undeserved infamy, and to tell of the various disguises she had assumed, and the journeys she had taken to that end, her companion's grief was swallowed up in amazement, and she could only congratulate herself that Leona's ingenuity had led her to her abode before it was too late to assist her.

"I have never felt such peace since George disappeared as I do now," said Madame Antoine, as Leona's narrative concluded. "I am going rapidly. In a few days at the outside, all the cares of this world will be ended for me, and I shall meet him again where there is no misunderstanding and false accusations, and be able to tell him that I was the means of comforting his daughter's heart, and rewarding her courage, before I died."

"You have comforted me beyond measure," cried Leona, enthusiastically. "All the trouble of the past years seems as nothing now, and all the blankness of the future obliterated. My father's name will be purified again, and he will sleep quietly in his unknown grave. You have been his good angel and mine."

"Yet had it not been for me all this misery would never have occurred."

"But you loved him, madame, and could

not foresee the end. Love covers a multitude of sins."

"You speak feelingly, my child. You have a lover of your own," said Madame Antoine with a look of scrutiny.

Leona blushed scarlet.

"Indeed I have not, nor do I know what it is to love in that way. My dear father has been my sole thought both before and after his death."

"And you have no friends?"

"Very few."

"Ah! that I might have lived to be your friend and mother."

"You have been my best friend, madame."

"And you mine. What would these poor starving little wretches have done without your help to-day? How little I ever thought I should live to receive charity at the hands of George Evans' daughter!"

"You are not hurt at so receiving it, I

hope. Think that I am my father's messenger, and that his spirit sent me here to you. I owe everything to you. The oath to which my life was dedicated has been accomplished through your assistance. My heavy task is ended, and I can return to my own occupation with a peaceful mind. Why, when I am so much your debtor, should you shrink from sharing the little I possess so long as we both have need of it?"

"If you really are my debtor," cried the dying woman, as she grasped her hand, "free yourself from the claim by one act of charity."

"What is that?"

"Let me see my daughter once more—bring my Lucilla to my bedside that I may kiss her before I die."

The tone of entreaty in which this request was made, was so urgent that Leona had not the heart to combat it, though at the same time she had no idea how, with Mr. Evans'

prejudices, the deed was ever to be accomplished.

"You are silent," said Madame Antoine, "you will not do it for me. Oh! think how strong a mother's claim is! How small a recompense a few minutes' interview is for a life of silence and separation!"

"I remember it all, and my greatest wish at present is to afford you this gratification. I am only thinking how to accomplish it. You must not forget that I am in Mr. Evans' household in the capacity of a servant, and have no voice in any of the actions of his adopted daughter. Lucilla believes that I am the niece of the old lady to whose care she was confided at Willowside. So do her aunt and uncle; and my supposed knowledge of her parentage and the family disgrace are the only claims I possess upon their patronage or protection."

"But you will not keep up this disguise

for ever? Surely a day will come when you will disclose your identity to Mr. Evans as you have done to me?"

"I will disclose it to-morrow, upon one condition."

"And that is——?"

"That I may place this confession in his hands, to prove to him that my father was not a murderer."

"Oh, not before I am gone!" exclaimed Madame Antoine, shrinking from the shame of exposure. "Let me go in peace, it cannot be long first, and then tell them what you choose."

"Then I see no means of bringing Lucilla and you together. I can have but one plea to make to my uncle on your behalf—that your courage has cleared the honour of his dead brother. Give me leave to make this statement public, and I will engage to bring my sister to your side."

"I agree," said Madame Antoine, faintly, "to anything—to everything—only let me see my child again."

As Leona drove rapidly from Madame Antoine's lodgings to the house in Hyde Park Gardens, she forgot everything except her long-looked-for success. She was once more the Leona of Brazil — the actress of New York; she was ready to rush into her uncle's presence with the precious document she held in her hand, and proclaim in one breath her own identity and her father's innocence. She lost sight of her disguise and the necessity for not relinquishing it too suddenly; she only remembered that she was herself, and her hot generous blood would inevitably have led her into some most awkward predicament, had she not been rudely recalled to a sense of her position by one of her supposed fellow-servants. She had been so oblivious of the flight of time during her visit to Madame

Antoine, that it was evening before she reached the Evans' house. Dinner was evidently over, and the moving figures of the men-servants in the dining-room, seen clearly through the open window, showed that they were clearing the table. One of them came to the door in answer to Leona's knock.

"*You'll* catch it," he remarked, ominously, as she entered the hall. (Perhaps, had he known what a young and pretty woman he was addressing, he might have worded his warning more politely.) "Why, there's been a dinner-party here to-night, and the whole house has been turned upside down looking for you to dress Miss Lucilla. I shouldn't wonder if you get warning to-morrow for being absent without leave."

"A dinner-party! I quite forgot it," cried Leona.

And with the remembrance came upon her

the thought of her disguise, and the character she must still assume.

"The orders was that you was to go to the drawing-room as soon as ever you came in," continued the man.

"Oh, very well," replied Leona, preparing to go upstairs.

"And I'd sooner be I than you," said James, as a parting shot, as he returned to the dining-room. This little colloquy had recalled our heroine to herself. *This* was not the moment to make her discovery known. With a room full of strangers, and without previous warning, she would have great difficulty in making her story understood, yet she chafed at the delay. She felt as if she could not keep the truth to herself another moment. She wrenched the prim gray front that covered her thick chestnut curls (now grown to a tolerable length again) from side to side impatiently, and twisted the bows of

the cap that surmounted it out of all shape and decency. She renovated her wrinkles and crow's-feet with a vigour that made them caricatures, and replaced her spectacles, without so much as a second glance to see if she looked natural or not. As she entered the drawing-room, Mrs. Evans and several of the ladies present looked up at her with surprise. The paint and powder on her face were so apparent that her mistress thought at first that she must have been indulging in a drop too much. But unabashed and indifferent to general opinion, Leona made her way up to Lucilla's couch. The guests were not astonished to see her enter, for Miss Evans' chronic weakness was so well known that it was usual to see her maid in attendance on her.

"So you have come at last?" remarked Mrs. Evans, in a significant tone, as the supposed Miss Gibson approached her daughter's side.

"Yes. I am sorry I forgot the dinner-party, but I have been detained," was Leona's cool reply. Mrs. Evans felt indignant.

Les nouveaux riches are always more ready to take umbrage at anything like inattention on the part of their servants, than those who have been accustomed to be waited on all their lives, but even she felt this was not the place or time to make her anger apparent.

"You had better see if Miss Lucilla requires anything, now you have come," she rejoined, sternly, as she moved away amongst her guests. Leona drew nearer to Lucilla's couch; the girl was occupied, and did not perceive her. But one person did; and that one was Christobal Valera. Leona's eye had singled his figure out directly she entered the room; and as the door opened to admit Miss Gibson, he had known that it was she, and each heart had trembled and turned faint beneath the knowledge of the presence of the other.

Christobal was seated by Lucilla's couch, apparently occupied in destroying her fan. He had not spoken to Leona since the last conversation related to have taken place between them, but had confined his attentions whilst in her presence entirely to Miss Evans, greatly to the annoyance of Dr. Hastings, who hovered about his patient and her new cavalier with perturbed and jealous countenance.

Leona stood some little way apart, and watched them. Christobal saw that she was watching, and redoubled his efforts to appear absorbed in the conversation he was carrying on with Lucilla. This was his method of punishing Leona for her disregard of his wishes; it has been a favourite mode of punishment with lovers for many centuries past, but it has not lost its power, nor perhaps ever will. You may argue, and reason with, and persuade a woman as much

as lies in your power, and find her obstinate; but once let her see you turn your attention to another, let her imagine her influence weakened, her attractions failing, her kingdom threatened, and, whether she love you or whether she love you not, she will use her keenest weapons with which to win you back to her side. A woman with a worshipper is a dog in the manger. She may not choose to take him herself, but she will not let another have him; and this propensity, born of selfishness and vanity, has too often led the sex into serious error; for, sooner than lose a subject, they will accept a ruler, and the change is more sudden than they care for afterwards.

Leona was no exception to the rest of womankind. From her childhood she had been accustomed to the adoration of Christobal Valera, and not a thought had ever entered her head that it would be withdrawn from her.

She had rejected his proffered love again and again, simply because she believed that it would be always at her disposal. She had heard him swear times out of mind that she was and ever would be the only woman in the world for him, and her feminine vanity found no difficulty whatever in crediting the statement. She had been playing with the young Spaniard's heart for years, as an angler plays with his line, but she had never seriously contemplated the possibility of a life passed without him, at all events in the capacity of a friend or a brother, as she loved to call him. And that he should attempt even to dally with another woman appeared to her incomprehensible, unnatural, unjust.

Yet now she had to stand in her assumed capacity of servant, and listen to the half-whispered nonsense he was breathing into her employer's ear. And not only to listen, but

to fall so completely into the snare as to believe that it was real. What will not a woman believe to torture herself withal when her fears and her jealousy are once aroused? She drew as near to the sofa as she dared, so as to intercept the compliments which were bringing so bright a flush to Lucilla's pale cheeks, and causing her to stammer and hesitate in her replies. She seized every opportunity that offered of addressing her young mistress, and asking if she felt too warm, if her cushions were comfortable, if she should fetch her something to drink? And Lucilla, unwilling to have her conversation with the handsome Spaniard interrupted, answered with short impatient negatives, that made Valera glance up at Leona with a look as though she were intruding. The girl's blood boiled. She felt as though it were impossible to stand by and endure it any longer—this monopolisation of her one friend by the daughter of Rebecca

Levitt. But then all that that daughter represented as the adopted child and heiress of Henry Evans flashed across her mind; and she acknowledged, with a sort of desperate pang, that since his proposals of marriage had been rejected by his first love, Lucilla would prove no unenviable match for the ambitious but impecunious Valera. His birth was unexceptionable, and his identity undisputed; and, as in her own case, Mr. Evans might tell him that his daughter's happiness was the first consideration, and she had money enough for them both.

A great ball rose in Leona's throat—she felt as if she were choking.

"The evening begins to feel chilly, Miss Lucilla," she said presently, anxious to break, if only for a moment, that whispered conference, which her jealous heart was translating with the most absurd exaggerations; "had I not better put this shawl about your shoulders?"

"Oh no! I'm as warm as possible," rejoined the girl. "I don't want anything, Gibson. You can go." And then, after a moment's pause, seeing that her suggestion had not been complied with, she turned round and reiterated the words.

"Did you not hear me tell you to go, Gibson? There is no occasion for you to remain here. I'll ring if I want anything."

And Leona had no alternative but to turn round and quit the drawing-room, leaving Christobal Valera seated in an attitude of adoration at the feet of Lucilla Evans. She did not see the look of longing his dark eyes cast after her—she did not hear the sigh that broke from him as she disappeared from view. She only knew she had left him there, and the thought made her desperate. She felt like a tigress about to be robbed of her whelps, and the golden light gleamed fitfully in her eyes and made them dangerous. She ran upstairs

with the agility of twenty. It was well for her that no one met her on the way, though she had become indifferent to what people might think or say, as was proved by her next actions. As soon as she had reached the privacy of her own room, she locked the door, and pulling off her dress and apron, cap, wig, spectacles, and all the minutiæ that constituted her disguise, she washed off the paint and powder that disfigured her beautiful face, brushed back the thick curls from her forehead, and arrayed herself in the attire in which she had gone down to Brighton. Then she stood before the mirrors, fresh, youthful, and glowing, with the deep crimson flush still mantling on her cheek that had been called up by Christobal's apparent desertion. She was not thinking now of her father's innocence, or her own identity. She was only bent upon discovering herself for the sake of laying an open claim to Valera's friendship and sympathy,

and to divert his attention from her half-sister. She no longer stayed to consider the inexpediency of the place as the occasion. Had royalty itself been present, it would not have deterred her from her purpose. Impulsive, energetic, and determined as these pages have ever represented her to be, and kindling with the new passion awakened in her breast, Leona would have walked through fire to attain her object. As soon as she had once more transformed herself from the prim old-maidish Miss Gibson to the glorious creature heaven had made her, she went deliberately downstairs again. Her intention had been to go into the dining-room and thence summon a servant to usher her amongst the company; but as she reached the landing, she encountered one of the footmen engaged in clearing away the remains of some light refreshment.

"Announce me to your mistress," she said, imperiously.

The man stared at seeing a stranger descend from the upper storey, but he had no idea of her identity, and no right to question the order given him.

"By what name, miss?" he demanded, in surprise.

"Miss Leona Evans," she answered steadily, and accordingly the drawing-room door was thrown open, and "Miss Leona Evans" was shouted in that peculiar tone adopted by the London footman who desires to make himself heard above the clamour of a chattering crowd. The mere entrance of an unexpected guest at that hour would have created a commotion, but as the owners of the house heard the sound of their own name, and turned to watch the advent of this beautiful, stately, and foreign-looking stranger, their astonishment knew no bounds.

Mr. Evans advanced towards her bowing, with a formal questioning smile that told

its own story, but Leona prevented the need of explanation by going straight to the point.

"Good evening, uncle," she said, holding out her hand. "I am your niece, Leona Evans, the daughter of your brother George."

Had a hand-grenade been suddenly cast in the midst of the company it could not have caused more consternation. The rumour about "Brother George" was known to most of the guests, and the mere mention of his name had a visible effect upon both Mr. and Mrs. Evans.

"My brother George," stammered her uncle. "We have not heard of him for many years. We supposed that he was dead."

"He *is* dead," replied Leona, solemnly. "But he has left *me* behind him to be a living witness of the purity of his life, and the falsehood of the cruel slanders that caused his death. And if you do not believe my word, uncle, ask Don Christobal Valera, who has

known me from my birth, and knew my dear father for many years, if what I have spoken is not the truth. Tobal, you will not desert me in this extremity."

As she turned her beseeching face towards him, Valera, who had sprang to his feet directly she had entered the room, came towards her.

"Desert you, Leona," he said, reproachfully. "How can you wrong me by putting the question? Mr. Evans, what this lady has told you is correct. She was born and brought up in the same part of the Brazils as myself, and she is the daughter of your dead brother, George Evans."

"But how long have you been in England? If this is the case, why did you not come to see us before," demanded Mr. Evans, still incredulous.

"I *have* been to see you before, uncle," replied Leona archly (she had fast hold of

Valera's hand by this time, and could afford to be playful). "Have you forgotten the boy who called himself Christobal Valera, and disappeared so mysteriously from your house; and Miss Gibson, who waited on your adopted daughter, Lucilla?"

"Don Christobal — Miss Gibson — what have they to do with you?" said Mr. Evans, still more mystified.

"I am the false Don Valera—I am Miss Gibson," replied Leona. "I assumed those disguises for the purpose of entering your house. Forgive me, uncle! I know it was not a worthy part to play, but I had a purpose which trampled down every other consideration before it."

"What purpose?"

"The clearance of my dead father's name from the foul charge of a murder which he never committed. Uncle, he lived and died under that suspicion, but I knew him to be

innocent, and I swore an oath over his dead body that I would prove him so."

"And you have done it, Leona?"

"I have done it! I hold in my hand the written confession of Richard Levitt, the real murderer, and as soon as I obtained it, I resolved to make myself known to you. I ought perhaps to apologise to this company," continued Leona, her native courtesy returning to her as the chief load was lifted from her mind, and she looked at the wondering faces that surrounded her, "for having broken up their intercourse by the introduction of my own affairs; but they will forgive a daughter's anxiety to clear away the foul stain that rests upon the memory of a beloved parent. And since the wrong done to my father was a public wrong, the reparation should be made public also."

"*George innocent!*" exclaimed Mr. Evans, in a bewildered, wondering manner. "My

dear brother's name cleared from guilt! And you are his child? I see it now—his likeness in every feature. Leona, let me embrace you for his sake."

And then the heroic daughter received the first instalment of her reward in finding herself folded in her uncle's arms.

"You forgive me for all my deception, uncle," she whispered.

"*Forgive you,* dear child! I bless you for adopting any means by which to arrive at this most happy conclusion. Oh Leona! I loved him very, very dearly. I have never got over our cruel separation. But this is a subject of which I cannot speak to you now."

The guests began to find out it was time they should return home, and no one had the duplicity to ask them to remain. Family explanations and reconciliations are best carried on in private, and in a few minutes the large rooms were cleared of all but those

who were residing in the house. Then Leona felt she might give the reins to her tongue, and her recital was as efficient as it was rapid.

"Here is the proof, uncle," she said, in conclusion, as she placed Levitt's confession in his hand. "I leave it with you, I know that you will take all means to make it public."

"And from whom did you procure it, Leona?"

"From Rebecca Levitt—now Rebecca Antoine."

"She is still living then?"

"She is still alive, but her days will be very few; and she has one great and earnest desire to be fulfilled before she dies, uncle."

"And that is——?"

"To be able to see her daughter—my father's child, once more!"

Mr. Evans glanced uneasily at Lucilla, who was standing near with her somewhat weak

glance fixed wonderingly upon her new cousin, as she supposed Leona to be. It was evident that she had never been informed of the secret of her parentage.

"Do you think it would increase the happiness of Rebecca Levitt's child to be made acquainted with her mother?"

"Uncle! that is for you to decide. I only promised to use my influence with you to procure the dying woman this last pleasure, in return for the service she has done my father's memory."

"We will speak on the subject further to-morrow, Leona," replied Mr. Evans. "Meanwhile, let me assure you how happy it makes me to acknowledge you as my niece. The world little knows how deeply I have mourned my beloved brother's loss. I have hoped against hope that he might be restored to us, or some news heard of him or his descendants, but I little thought the fulfilment of it was so

near at hand. To prove to you that what I say is true, I have never touched the principal of that portion of my fortune which should have been George's, and came, instead, to me; but have laid it up carefully against the possibility of his return, and left it in my will, to any one of his legitimate posterity that might be forthcoming to claim it. This money will be yours, Leona, not at my death, but now. I look upon you as a second daughter. You shall not be worse dowered than Lucilla."

"Oh, uncle, how I have misjudged you!" exclaimed Leona, as she again embraced him.

"And so this gentleman has known you from your childhood?" remarked Mr. Evans presently, as he directed his attention to Christobal; "and was the friend and pupil of my dear brother. Let me welcome you over again, and with double measure for that reason, Don Valera. And what relation do

you call yourself to my niece here? Brother, eh, or bosom friend?"

Leona glanced up shyly at Christobal. His dark eyes rested upon hers, glowing with passion, and imploring her to name the relationship between them. She could not misunderstand their language nor resist it, and her heart prompted her to reward him at last for all his patient, faithful love to her.

"Don Christobal Valera is my affianced husband, uncle," she answered simply, as she stretched forth her hand and felt it clasped as in a vice between his own. . . . .

"If I permit Lucilla to visit Madame Antoine, will you engage that the fact of her being her mother is not revealed to her, Leona?" said Mr. Evans, the next morning as they sat together in the study discussing all the wonderful disclosures of the night before.

"I should think Madame Antoine would

be ready to agree to the terms, uncle, and I can but go into the room first and see," replied Leona.

"On these conditions she may go, but I think it most advisable that the secret of her birth should not be revealed to her. She is not strong, physically or mentally, and I cannot anticipate what effect such a revelation might have on her. Added to which, I may tell you, Leona, that Dr. Hastings, who has been a friend of our family for many years, and is a man in whom I have implicit confidence, has proposed to me for Lucilla—(ah, you rogue! I little thought the reason you fought so shy of the honour of taking her in this very study a few weeks ago!)—and I think he has every chance of succeeding in his suit. He is thoroughly fond of the girl, and understands the management of her health, so he is by far the best husband she could have. I have told him, of course, whose

child she really is, and he has no objection to her on that score, but agrees with me she had better be left in ignorance of the fact. Still, if it will give this poor dying woman any comfort to see Lucilla, it is one we have no right to deny her."

"I think not, uncle, and I have no doubt Madame Antoine will see the matter in a proper light also."

But here she sighed.

"You are disappointed yourself," said Mr. Evans. "You would doubtless have been glad to welcome a sister in my dear girl."

"No, uncle, I did not sigh for that. I can show Lucilla quite as much affection as a cousin as I could as a sister; and I shall be with her but a little while, after all."

"What! Will not Don Valera and you take up your residence in England?"

"Oh no, uncle; at least not yet. Do not forget that I have been brought up in

the free woods, or the atmosphere of the stage, and the close air and cramped manners of your great city stifle me. I feel as if I could not breathe in London, nor move, nor speak. Tobal and I will visit Spain first, and then return to New York, and pursue our former avocations. We should not be happy else."

"I am disappointed," said Mr. Evans. "I hoped to keep you by my side."

"By-and-by, perhaps, uncle; in a few years, when we have grown older and more sedate; but for the present let us have our way. And you have Lucilla, remember, to be with you always."

* * * * *

That afternoon, the carriage conveyed Leona, Lucilla, and Dr. Hastings to the abode of Madame Antoine.

Mr. Evans had thought it better they should go alone. He had no wish himself

to see Rebecca Levitt again; and thought that the sight of himself might revive recollections in her breast that would militate against the reserve he was desirous she should maintain before her daughter. Lucilla had been told nothing more than that a poor woman, who had been her nurse when a baby, was dying, and wished to see her once again. She had opened her pale blue eyes in surprise at the announcement, but had not thought it necessary to make any further inquiries on the subject; and her gratified reception of Dr. Hastings' attention whilst on the way there, showed how little she thought of the importance of the expedition. Leona watched her with amazement and a little disgust, and felt relieved to remember that it was not considered advisable she should claim her as a sister. With Lucilla Evans, any man who paid court to her was the right man; and she would be as happy in the future

with Dr. Hastings as she would have been with anybody else. She was a phase of womanhood that made Leona anything but proud of belonging to the sex. But Tom Hastings was content, so no one had a right to be otherwise.

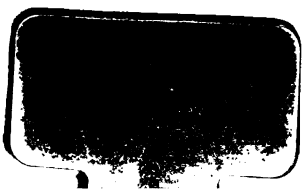
They arrived at the dilapidated-looking row of houses in due time, Lucilla making many a remark at the strangeness of papa's behaviour in sending her on such an errand. Leona, according to pre-arrangement, ascended the stairs first alone.

She reached the door, she stopped at it, and receiving no answer, went in. On the floor sat the dirty children, playing at such games as took their fancy; at the table sat the eldest girl with some woman, a neighbour summoned on the occasion; on the bed lay a figure, covered with the sheet on which it had lain.

Rebecca Levitt could never now disclose

the relationship she bore to the young lady, dressed in silks and laces, flirting with Dr. Hastings in the carriage below.

She was dead, taken out of this sphere of misery and disappointment, to one where, it is to be hoped, a true heart counts for more than many a marriage-ring.

THE END.

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